

Board of
PEOPLE'S SERVICE
Presb. Board of Foreign Missions

JESS



T. MORRIS LONGSTRETH



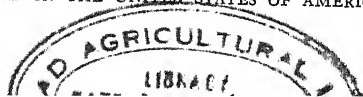
PHILADELPHIA
THE WESTMINSTER PRESS
1941



Copyright, 1941, by THE WESTMINSTER PRESS

All rights reserved — no part of this book
may be reproduced in any form without
permission in writing from the publisher,
except by a reviewer who wishes to quote
brief passages in connection with a review
written for magazine or newspaper.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



F

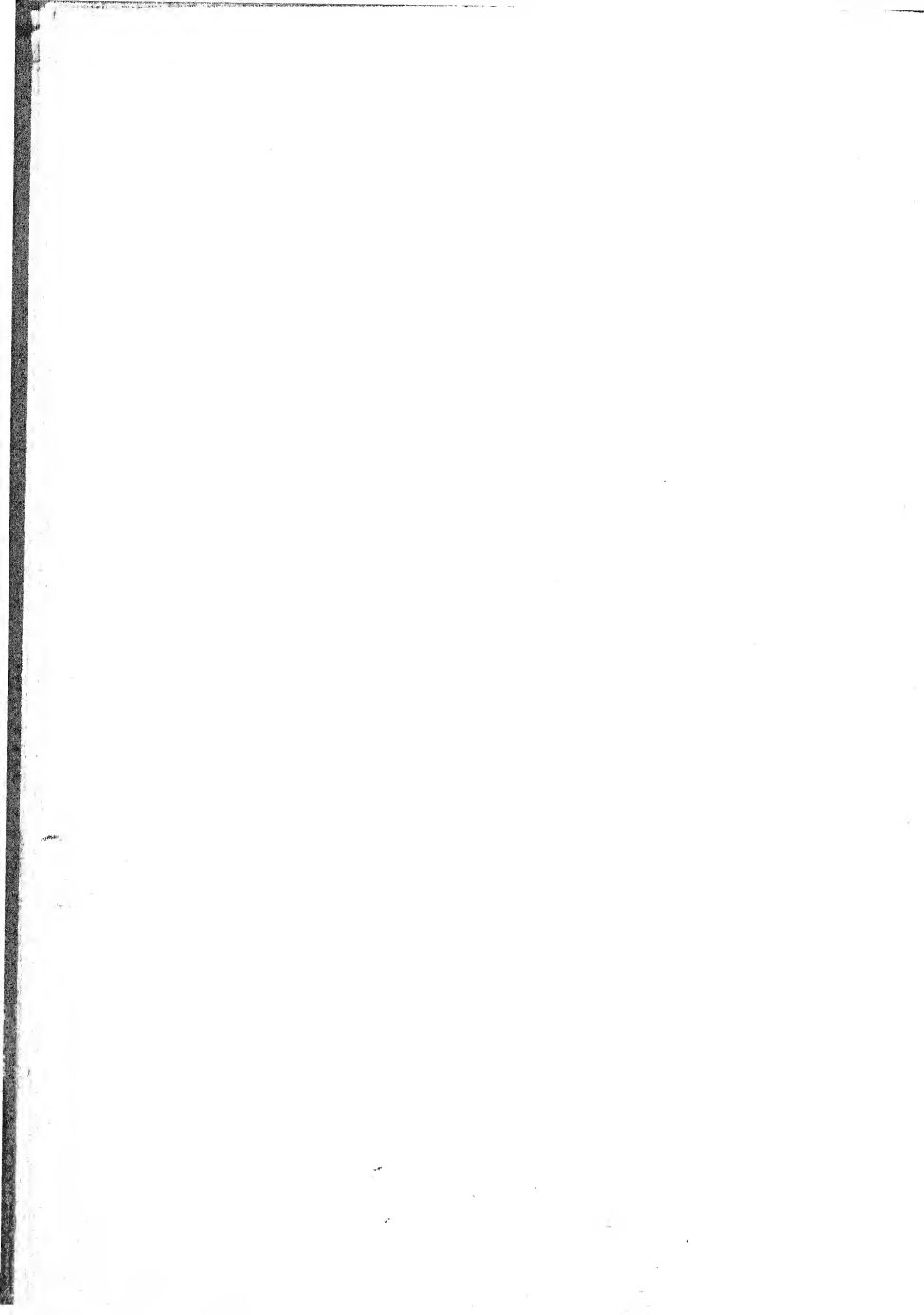
Received from
READER'S SERVICE
Presb. Board of Foreign Missions

Affectionately Dedicated

to My Niece

PRISCILLA LONGSTRETH





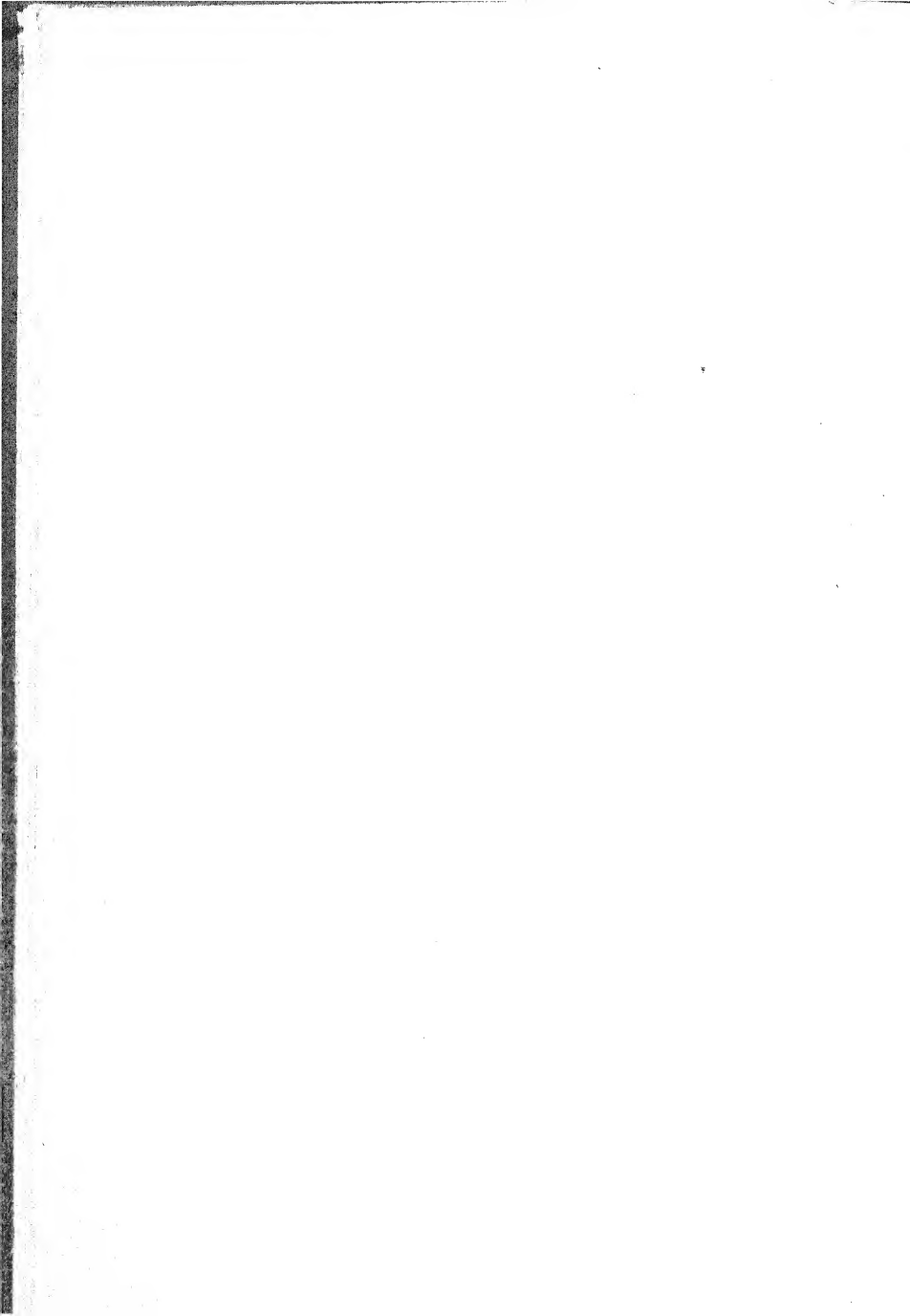
Received from
READER'S SERVICE

First Board of Foreign Missions

CONTENTS

1. The Heroine of Maine Point	9
2. Jess Starts Something	24
3. Natural History: Boy	40
4. The Interview	62
5. Wallop, Wallop, Wallop, Bliss	86
6. The Risk	109
7. Jess Steps Out	141
8. Thank You, Mr. C.	167
9. The Duel	200
10. Re-enter Eddie	223
11. Harvest	238





THE HEROINE OF MAINE POINT

Copyright 1907
by
J. M. G. PUBLISHERS
New York and London

1



THAT May Tuesday morning Jessie Randall walked the familiar street of Maine Point in an invisible cloak. Had she been visible to the storekeepers, the early buyers, the loafing fishermen waiting for the tide, and the farmers to whom 8.30 A.M. was as midday, Jessie would have been the subject of even more acrid comment than usual.

They saw her outward shape and habiliments, of course — a rather long-legged girl of sixteen with the free gait of a woods goer. The more alive noticed the profusion of her red-brown hair, the open attractive face with its blue eyes set well apart. As she passed Sheriff Poulson, who got paid for observing a little more sharply than others, she could have heard him say to his companion, "Lawyer Randall's girl's fillin' right out, ain't she?"

Yet, in spite of all these minor observations, Jess proceeded unseen, as invisible as the vibration in the air which, upon



JESS

suitable reception, was to turn into a burst of radio music. Not a soul in that mile of straggling village divined the excitement behind those blue eyes. Not a soul rightly interpreted the self-possessed smile which occasionally widened her curving lips. Why, they didn't even know that, at this moment, their Jess was the gracious Patricia Randall, beautiful, witty, wise, wealthy, and fascinating. They were unaware that already she was wording the invitation to her housewarming, to the magnificent home practically being started on her estate adjoining the Wolvertons'. It is no exaggeration to say that the real Jess was as invisible as Cleopatra.

She turned into the post office clasping the envelope which was to divulge the future heroine of Maine Point to Maine Point. It contained the winning answer to the great soap contest. It was the winning answer because the soapmakers had stressed originality in their offer, and Jess knew that she was original. It was the cause of her lack of popularity in Maine Point, where nobody liked to be startled by originality or have his thoughts jolted out of the customary rut. Maine Point recognized that the daughter of Lawyer Randall had a right to be smart and a cut above them in nimbleness of mind. But the village mostly liked to know what a person was going to say before he said it, and Jess said such unexpected things.

Mr. Josiah Struthers, the postmaster, was soon to find this

THE HEROINE OF MAINE POINT

out. Jess pushed the envelope under the brass grill to him and asked to have her letter registered.

The elderly man who had known Jess first as an infant and had kept six or seven years behind her development said: "Now, now, Jess! What can you be up to? You want it registered, you say? That'll be all of fifteen cents extra."

"It's worth it, Mr. Struthers."

"Wal," said Mr. Struthers, who did not want to see people waste their money, "perhaps . . . Any value?"

"Yes, \$25,000," Jess said. The first prize was a choice between that amount in immediate cash or an annuity of \$100 a month for as long as one lived — a difficult choice, but not for Jess, whose chief object was to wake up Maine Point, and \$25,000 was considerably more thrilling than a succession of \$100 checks, no matter how long drawn out.

"No value," Mr. Struthers mumbled over his writing. He had heard Jess talk before.

Jess didn't hear him because her attention had been caught by one of those posters giving the photographs of a wanted criminal, in two poses, with his crime and aliases. For an instant the idea of being raised to such notoriety struck her as exciting. Then her sound nature rebuked her. Fame, yes. That should be hers; that *must* be hers. But never, never must she do anything undesirable, let alone wicked.

Mr. Struthers shoved the thin little receipt at her.

JESS

"Oh, don't you thrill all over, Mr. Struthers, to think how much excitement and happiness goes through your hands?" Jess exclaimed.

"I don't know as I do," Mr. Struthers said truthfully. "I don't know as I ever thought about it."

"But it's so beautiful!" Jess cried, being more and more fired by her imagination. "You sit there and hold the reins of the world. Some boy is waiting in . . . in Wyoming, say, for a letter, a love letter, and you are the one who makes it possible for him to receive it. You sell, for one cent, a post card that can take the three words necessary to make someone happy. It's the most wonderful job in the world. I should think you'd never get over the thrill of it."

Mr. Struthers looked at his old bumpy hands. "I'd thrill more," he said, "if I didn't have the rheumatiz in 'em."

Jess left, for the school dead line was nearing. The trouble with Mr. Struthers was that he had lived in his little cage too long. His wings had fallen off. That was the trouble with all of the people in Maine Point. They all lived in cages. Well, she wouldn't! Oh, it would be so wonderful if she won that prize! Or even the second prize of \$10,000.

As Jess passed Miss Simpson's narrow little shop she remembered the spool of silk that her mother wanted and went in. The bell above the door tinkled as it had always tinkled in Jess's childhood, when it had been an adventure to go in.

THE HEROINE OF MAINE POINT

Nor had Miss Simpson changed. She was just as pale and quiet and resigned. She reminded Jess of an anemone, if you could imagine an anemone content to dress all its life in gray. The sign over the shop amused Jess: DRESS GOODS AND NOTIONS. The idea of Miss Simpson selling notions struck Jess as very funny indeed, because if anyone in Maine Point had run out of notions thirty years ago, it was Miss Simpson. Now she'll say, "What can I do for you, Jessie?" Jess thought.

The bell called Miss Simpson in from the little back room where she did her sewing. "What can I do for you, Jessie?" she asked.

Jess told her, without smiling, and while Miss Simpson was looking in the little drawers of spools, fascinating because of the silk's pure colors, Jess tried to imagine herself shut up in this cage whose bars were bolts of cloth, and sympathy for poor little Miss Simpson overcame her.

"Oh, wouldn't you love to fly?" she asked impulsively. "Wouldn't you simply *love* to have wings, Miss Simpson, and rise into the air and fly and fly until you were tired and came down to rest, say, on Boston Common or Radio City?"

"I don't think I should, dear," said the startled Miss Simpson. "I get giddy very easily."

"But you wouldn't in *my* kind of flying," Jess assured her.

JESS

"Just think, you could go to California or see the equator and watch crocodiles swimming in the Amazon!"

"I'm sure I shouldn't like that," Miss Simpson said. "Now, this spool matches. Will that be all?"

"I'm going to fly someday," Jess affirmed, as she paid for the spool.

"I expect so," Miss Simpson said, unmoved. That, to Jess, was the most painfully discouraging thing about Miss Simpson. She always replied, "I expect so," to your most astounding communications and of course that ended everything. If Jess longed for one thing more than the many others, it was to find a person to talk with who never ran out, a person who never tired of flying, conversationally. Mr. Meekom, the minister, could have been such a person, if he had been younger and not so easily shockable. Her father was a little that way, but of course he was her father and his lawyer mind kept getting in the way. Bill Wolverton, she suspected, might be such a person, but he was a Princeton sophomore, and she had just about as much chance of really talking to him as to Bing Crosby.

Jess continued schoolward, her mind busying itself with this conversational loneliness. What was the matter with the people in Maine Point? Why was everyone so content, like white rabbits in a cage? Yet they weren't. You couldn't

THE HEROINE OF MAINE POINT

find a person who admitted to being content. Living, Jess dimly felt, was a search after ability. You learned to bake a spongecake and then tried to bake a better one, if you were any good. You watched the summer people, especially the girls your own age, and determined to make your clothes smarter-looking, like theirs. You wrote your weekly essay for Miss Tottem not just any old way but like the great writers. Why? Because there was something in you that incited you to do it. But why?

Jess's mental search for the answer was interrupted by her pet detestation, Eddie Briggs. His offense was slight, for a fourteen-year-old. He ran up from behind dragging a stick against the palings of Mr. Chalkley's fence, making a hideous racket. As he passed Jess he joggled her elbow. The books in her arm fell and her new English composition slid over the pavement.

"Do you always have to make a noise?" Jess demanded as Eddie stopped. Eddie had just become a Boy Scout, and this part of him walked slowly over to the girl; but the other part, the pre-Scout Eddie, resented Jess and was in no hurry to help her. "Mr. Chalkley's the undertaker. How do you know he isn't conducting a funeral?"

"Undertakers don't conduct funerals," Eddie replied.

"You know what I mean, getting ready for one," Jess

JESS

said, smarting a little at being corrected by the boy. "Don't you ever think of anybody else?"

"Yep," Eddie said, his black eyes rolling disrespectfully in his round face. "I'm thinking of you, and I don't like it much. Minnie Treadwell says you're the most stuck-up girl she ever knew."

"Thanks for telling me," Jess retorted. "That's the second good deed you've done in five minutes. You'll soon be an Eagle Scout at that rate." She recovered her composure. "Now I'll have to copy it over."

Conscience struggled obviously on Eddie's face with baser instincts, and lost. Her shaft had gone too far home to make apology easy. Embarrassment turned to bravado as the school bell rang. "You'll be late," he said over his chubby shoulder. "And everybody'll cry."

"Insect!" Jess's mind exclaimed. Then, "Why do I do it?" She was ashamed of herself, and yet Eddie had always managed to goad her into impatience. There was no reason why she should set herself up as his disciplinarian. But she was forever catching him at something so distasteful to her that correction followed. She loved animals and Eddie had had a mania for teasing them that sometimes amounted to cruelty. Their mutual antagonism had begun over a cat which he had set adrift in the river on a slippery cake of ice. She had caught him laughing at the cat's terror as it lurched

THE HEROINE OF MAINE POINT

and clawed. She had slapped him and sent him running away crying and had ruined her clothes in her effort to rescue the animal.

Other incidents piled up with a few in-between attempts at reconciliation, for Jess saw that Eddie had the extra high spirits and ingenuity, although misguided, which she missed in so many other Maine Pointers, and he had a difficult home life, too. His father was a mate on an oil tanker and rarely at home. His mother lived on the outskirts of the community and depended upon the sign TOURISTS to catch her enough summer people to give her three children the extra things needed. It was thanks, indirectly, to Jess that Eddie had been inducted into Scouthood. The change in him had not been remarkable.

Jess slid into her classroom before Miss Tottem, who was calling the roll, had reached the R's. Nobody, she reflected, was crying at the thought of her being late. What had induced Eddie to say that? Why should he so horribly repeat Minnie Treadwell's remark about her being the most stuck-up girl? Was there any reason for it?

Jess felt a baffling sort of unhappiness well up in her. She had no desire to feel conceited, and still less wish to show it. Yet was she telling herself the truth? Why was she so desperately anxious to win that soap-contest money? To have that huge sum of money? Of course. But wasn't there

JESS

another reason? Jess admitted it to herself. She wanted to startle Maine Point, to stun the sleepy natives awake to the wonderful, gorgeous, remarkable girl in their midst whom they called *stuck-up*. She wasn't stuck-up. She was *great*, even if no one realized it in the smallest particular. *And she would show them!* Let them call her names now. Someday when they listened to her on the radio, or, maybe, even saw her on the screen, they'd say: "Land to goodness! Who'd ever thought we could be so dumb as not to know Jessie Randall had it in her. And now she's gone to where she's appreciated. You can't blame her."

Then, Jess concluded this rapturous dream, she'd return to Maine Point, probably in a private plane, and be so nice to everybody! She'd ask for the school children to have a holiday. The whole village . . .

"The class in English composition will now recite."

Miss Matilda Tottem's positive voice was not an unpleasant interruption, for this was Jess's favorite half hour. It was a small class, four girls and three boys, and Jess had the inward satisfaction of knowing how much abler she was than the others at putting down her thoughts on paper. Minnie Treadwell, the next best, was nowhere. Miss Tottem of course did not put it so strongly. Jess realized that a teacher must not discourage the rest. Sometimes though, Jess thought, Miss Tottem might praise her more adequately in-

THE HEROINE OF MAINE POINT

stead of always finding something new to find fault with.

The seven had by now taken their seats in the front row and Miss Tottem was handing back last week's essay. Jess took hers eagerly, hoping as always to find the superlative praise at last in Miss Tottem's fine handwriting. She had taken extra pains with this one. She had had great fun doing it, too, because it made the natives of Maine Point look a little stuffy and ridiculous.

The idea was this: A girl (of Jess's age, of course) wanders into the woods and falls asleep and dreams that she and the animals — a deer, a fox, a porcupine, a rabbit, and a chipmunk — converse. They understand each other perfectly. When the girl is waking the fox is listening to her as she says, "I wish you animals could get together oftener," and the fox replies, "We could, my dear, if you will only not forget . . ." Then his voice had died away. "Forget what?" the girl asks herself.

The dream is so vivid that she addresses the first red squirrel she sees and is unhappy when she cannot understand his chatter. Still drowsy, she is drifting back into the same dream when she again overhears the fox, who says, "The big stupid! Can't she ever remember to think of us as *we animals* instead of *you animals*?"

The girl wakes again, sees the red squirrel, and says, "I won't forget, brother. *We animals*. Of course it's *we ani-*

JESS

mals." And the red squirrel replies, absolutely intelligibly: "I do wish you'd go back to your village and tell them what you've just learned. It may put an end to the civil war. I'm very tired of being shot at by my cousins-in-law."

The girl hurries back to her village and tries to tell of her great discovery to her neighbors. She is laughed at, then ridiculed, then threatened, and the villagers go on shooting their woodland relatives.

Jess turned to the last page and read Miss Tottem's comment:

Fantastic, verging on the grotesque. Your heroine displays a worthy compassion for the animals. But her severe remarks about her fellow villagers fail to convince the reader that it is they who are the fools. Your usual faults are magnified in this paper, Jessie; hence the low mark. Write of that which you comprehend and leave these flights of fancy until you understand the life about you.

Jess's cheeks began to burn. Where would injustice stop? Miss Tottem had given her a 70 and Jess could see an 80, in blue pencil, on Minnie Treadwell's paper. Minnie had no doubt written another nice safe little story. Minnie's efforts were all alike and about as exciting as a lawn mower. At the words "lawn mower" an idea popped into Jess's mind. She would do her next story about a lawn mower, a conceited one that thought its noise sounded like the roar of a lion. It would

THE HEROINE OF MAINE POINT

go raging across the lawn, springing at dandelions, thinking how powerful and destructive its jaws were, until it hit a stick!

Jess laughed at her picture of the chagrin on the lawn mower's face. Then her laugh died. Miss Tottem would write, "Too fantastic."

Jess's hand shot up.

"What is it?" Miss Tottem asked.

"I would like to know," Jess began with a persimmony feeling in her mouth, "why we are taught one thing in the morning, and then get blamed if we practice it in the afternoon."

Instantly everyone in the class was listening. Miss Tottem's prim lips became firmly primmer. Outbursts like this had occurred before. "I don't understand you, Jessie."

"We had to study Emerson's *Self-Reliance*, didn't we?"

"Certainly."

"Then I want to know this. Didn't you *want* us to believe it? And *practice* it?" Jess could feel her heart bumping against her. "Or . . . or was it just . . . words?"

"There were many valuable lessons in that essay which we took up at the time. I still don't get the connection." Miss Tottem's gray eyes were fixed on the embarrassed girl over whom the school board had given her all powers.

"I . . . I was trying to be self-reliant and you . . . you

JESS

want me to be just like everybody else," Jess said. "He says . . . Emerson says, 'Hitch your wagon to a star.' But you say: 'Don't. It's fantastic.' You don't like my stories because they aren't like everyone else's. You don't really want me to . . . to be myself, do you?"

The attention of the class was breathless at this unprecedented frankness. Others were listening now. Even Eddie Briggs who had been sent to the board to struggle with an arithmetic problem turned to stare and store this stupendous scene in his memory for future usefulness.

Miss Tottem remained calm. "May I too quote from Emerson?" she asked Jess in just that tone of detachment which made Jess's angry sincerity sound very young. "Emerson has Nature say to someone who has become unduly incensed over something, 'Why so hot, my little man?'"

A snicker from Minnie Treadwell fitted into Miss Tottem's pause. Miss Tottem went on: "I am not unaware, Jessie, of the individuality in your efforts and I have tried to encourage your gifts. But it would be very remiss in me, as your teacher, not to remark your faults. It is only thus that one learns, and I presume that you wish to learn, although your attitude recently has not been encouraging. I think we can continue this discussion more profitably after class, but I leave this thought with you: The great are always humble.

THE HEROINE OF MAINE POINT

They desire to learn. They take correction meekly, seeing that it is for their own good. And, instead of flying off the handle at their would-be instructors, they thank them. You may sit down."

Jess sat down, writhing. She knew that she had deserved rebuke for her impulsive sarcasms. But she felt unjustly treated. She *did* want to learn. But some strong unfolding feeling within her fought against being clipped, pruned, chopped down to an uninteresting fraction of herself. Waves of heat rose into her face. She noticed that Minnie and others were looking intently at the board and smiling. She looked too and saw that Eddie Briggs had printed in large letters STUCK-UP.

This fresh red-hot coal piled on her already burning head surprisingly steadied Jess. Her consuming resolve hardened. "I'll show them," she said fiercely to herself. "I'll show them if it kills me. O God, *make* me win that contest! "



JESS STARTS SOMETHING

2



JESSIE RANDALL wiped the last teacup, dried the silver, sorted it into its places in the drawer, and then attacked the frying pan, her special enemy. There was something glum and morose about a frying pan, even when cleaned. Under the sink Noah, the black cat, licked his bowl and purred like a distant airplane with one engine missing. Jess had named him Noah because he didn't like water.

She was buoyantly happy, for this was Friday evening and Tuesday and Friday evenings were the high spots of the week. Sunday evening was well enough, especially in spring, for you felt all smoothed out and peaceful after a Sunday. And Saturday evening, even in a village as unexciting as Maine Point, had special joys. But on Tuesday evening at 9 o'clock came *We, the People*; at 9.30, *Would You Like It?* the most fascinating program of all, because it let you see into the daily lives of the great and told you how they got that way. On

JESS STARTS SOMETHING

Friday at 8.30 Jess never failed to listen to *Information, Please*.

That Jess could be happy at all on this Friday evening after her shattering experience in composition class and the unfortunate recriminations at recess afterward, shows what Jess's element was — an interior atmosphere, a strange exciting weather, as changeable in mood as an April sky, and yet constant, too, as the unfathomable blue is constant above the clouds. Like Maine Point, which at times was under the spell of the sea and at other times was pervaded by the pine forest, the daughter of Lawyer Randall and his helpmeet had stormy moments, foggy moments, but she had broad clear horizons, too. And on Tuesday evenings the heavens were always limitless and starry for her, no matter how the poor factual barometer in the living room might be acting.

This evening, as Jess struggled with the stout iron pan which her ancestors had called a spider, and very aptly, Jess thought, she was trying to frame a series of questions for *Information, Please* which would catch the eye of whoever selected the few questions used from the thousands sent in every week.

Jess had decided that her questions should be in verse, because she could not remember having heard one in verse, and she was saying over various rhymes of her own composition while bringing the spider up to her mother's standard of cleanliness.

JESS

Eeny, meeny, miney, mame!
Mr. Kieran, can you name
The woman who's more statues had
Than any other, good or bad?

But it's not very good, Jess decided. And Mr. Kieran would guess Joan of Arc anyway. That man knew everything. Jess, bearing down on a spot of burnt grease in the spider, sighed. She remembered her difficulties with the kings and queens of England. Mr. Kieran could probably reel them right off to Mr. Fadiman, with dates. If she only had a memory like his, she would astound people. *That* would make Minnie Treadwell jealous! Not to mention Eddie Briggs who had to stay in after school because his memory was as short as a tadpole's tail and as temporary. Miss Tottem, too, would admire her — that is, if Miss Tottem could admire anything but correct punctuation — and say: "That girl's a wonder. You can't stump her."

Jess, bending over the obdurate spider, allowed her mind to pursue the gratifying results of her perfect memory. It would be equally convenient out of school. She could talk to Bill Wolverton without the sickening feeling that he was simply being polite. She could, for example, memorize the names of all the players on the Princeton football team, and their big plays, and discuss them with him. She could do the same with the Yankees and the different all-American teams which

JESS STARTS SOMETHING

meant so much to him. She wouldn't have to think quickly when he mentioned the Cougars and the Badgers and the Wolverines and pray that she knew what she was saying. The one conversation she had had with Bill, last summer in the drugstore, had been exciting but perilous, because she had got all these animals mixed up in her head. He had looked at her with an intentness that flattered her then and given her a dizzying kind of pleasure since; but it would be wonderful to be sure that he was really interested and still more wonderful to hear him say: "You're a wonder, Jess! Most girls don't know the difference between a punt and a bunt."

Jess pushed the clean spider back on the stove and returned to Mr. Kieran. It would be glorious to stump him. Suddenly her mind gave that little leap of joy which was the sign of a brand-new idea. The spider! Of course!

Almost instantly she had the verse for it.

Name an insect that we use.
It dares the fire and cannot lose
Its legs because it hasn't any.
We wash it oftener than many.

Jess chuckled at the thought of washing an insect. Miss Tottem, now, would call that fantastic, she thought. But it's true. It's a perfectly fair question, too, since I tell him it hasn't legs.

RECEIVED FROM
READER'S SERVICE

Pres 87 Board of Foreign Missions

JESS

She looked at the clock. 8.20. What was it her mother had asked her to do? Oh, yes, wash out the dishcloths. She could do that in ten minutes. Oh, and Noah's bowl. Always one thing more.

But in a moment Jess's mind was miles above her hands. She was thinking about the next insect to go with a spider. There ought to be three. This was going to be hard.

Jess's hands might have belonged to an expert servant girl, but her attention walked with queens. Unknowingly, from small-girlhood when the heaviest chore expected of her was to shell the peas, she had perfected the art of doing household and garden routine painlessly. She lived in whatever sphere it pleased her agile fancy to inhabit. Sometimes Mrs. Randall complained that the rice pudding was scorched, but not often. And it was a small price to pay for being alive.

One unfortunate consequence of being alive was the necessity (for Jess) of being noticed. Favorably, of course. And when your better qualities were ignored, you had to live, in your mind, among people who could be depended upon to notice and appreciate you. Among noted people, that is. Celebrities who could spot promise in a girl and encourage it. This was why the invention of the radio had become more important to Jess than the discovery of America. It shared with her the lives of people beyond the smug and unimaginative confines of Maine Point, people she knew she would have

JESS STARTS SOMETHING

liked. It whispered, especially on Tuesdays and Fridays: "Come on, Patricia. Be famous and join us. It's the life!" Patricia was Jess's name for her *understood* self, the person she really was.

When the radio issued this invitation, Jess replied with a secret, "*I will.*" She did not especially care to keep this determination a secret, but the hints she had dropped had met with no encouragement, even in her own home. Families were hard to understand. They sent you to school to study the lives of dead celebrities. They gave you poems about ambitious people to recite, poems like "Excelsior," whose author had lived only a few miles down the coast from her home. Yet when you mentioned, while sweeping, that someday the sponsors of *We, the People* quite possibly might invite you to New York to tell about yourself, mother said, "Have you swept behind the sofa thoroughly, Jessie?" or, "Please don't forget to dust the picture frames, dear. You dream so while you're working."

8.29. Jess saw to it that the draft was off the stove, washed her hands, and held the door open in case Noah wished to go into the living room with her. But he had leaped up into the rocker, purring like an ash sifter. "All right. You have no manners," Jess said to him. "But you're independent. Just don't yowl to come in, that's all."

Mr. Randall was reading *The New York Times*. Her

JESS

mother was darning. They were dear people, Jess thought. The dearest in the world. If she ran a splinter into her finger, they would both be at once concerned. But if she ran one into her mind, in the shape of an ambition, *that* hardly mattered. Her father would say: "One thing at a time, Jess. Just now it's your education." And her mother: "You should get more sleep, dear. I wouldn't disturb myself about such things, if I were you."

Jess snapped on the radio. A gong sounding goldenly afar shattered the all too homey room of a small frame house in an obscure village and Jess took her seat in the glittering spaciousness of the *Information, Please* studio. No longer the schoolgirl victim of Miss Tottem's narrowness, but beautifully dressed, she was the visiting celebrity chosen to assist the three other experts on whose words were focused the ears of practically the entire nation. Modest, graceful, she chose a chair between Mr. John Kieran, whom she loved, and Mr. Oscar Levant, whose wit gave her the most delightful prickles down her spine. Mr. Clifton Fadiman, suave and just a mite scary, in a few seconds would be introducing her to the country—including the astonished inhabitants of Maine Point—and presently, after she had answered several difficult questions brilliantly, he would be saying: "Correct again, Miss Randall . . . I don't see how you do it."

JESS STARTS SOMETHING

During the preliminaries, which she knew by heart, Jess lent her attention to her father and mother, who had resumed an argument that sounded exciting.

"I just wish Eve had kept a diary," her mother was saying. "Then the world could know that it wasn't *all* her fault."

Jess loved these scimmages. Her father did, too, for his trained mind could play with an argument the way Noah played with a mouse; it was her mother who took things seriously. Jess gathered that her father had made some playful but derogatory remark about women — which was the short cut to a scrap — and so drew out her mother's wish that Eve had kept a diary.

"Can you see Eve keeping a diary?" Mr. Randall asked.

"I'd like to know why not!"

"Can you see *any* woman keeping a diary?"

"Dozens of women have."

"Name one."

"Well . . ." Mrs. Randall hesitated. "I haven't one at the tip of my tongue. But I know . . ."

It was usually at such a point that Jess came in on her mother's side, even though often she would have preferred to side with her father's common sense. "Madame de Staël," she now volunteered.

JESS

"The lady wrote letters," Mr. Randall observed to his daughter, of whose intelligence he was proud. "Are you sure she kept a diary?"

"Of course," Mrs. Randall chimed in. "Many women did when they had more time. Nowadays . . ."

"What did they put in them? Fashions? Or the reasons why they changed their minds?"

"Really, Elbert!" Mrs. Randall exclaimed. "Is your opinion of women so *very* low? Do you actually consider it impossible for us to have an objective and stick to it?"

"There you go — off the track!" Lawyer Randall pointed out delightedly. "I make the simple remark that it isn't in woman's nature to plod along day after day, or night after night, making entries in a blankbook as Emerson did, or Thoreau, and you instantly turn my remark into an indictment of woman's whole nature. If you'd told me that men don't darn socks, or even can't darn socks, do you think I should have blown up and accused you of meaning that men have no good traits whatever?"

"Please, Dad, what are you talking about?" Jess asked.

"Your father considers that women have too many ambitions," Mrs. Randall explained with a touch of warmth. "He wants us to sit and sew or cook. He says that if Eve . . ."

"Kindly quote me right, if you quote me at all," Mr.

JESS STARTS SOMETHING

Randall objected. "I said, Jess, that women were growing ambitious in the wrong directions."

"And he doesn't think that we have persistence enough to write a few lines in a diary every day," Mrs. Randall returned. "How do you suppose, Elbert, that dishes get washed, and floors scrubbed, and preserves put up? Because we are so flighty that we can't . . ."

"The point, dear, stick to the point," Mr. Randall begged with an amused patience. "What does scrubbing floors have to do with a diary? I was so ill-restrained, Jess, as to observe that women don't write diaries because it's not their nature to. But forget it. It doesn't matter."

"I think it matters a great deal," Mrs. Randall said decidedly.

"So do I," Jess chimed in. "And I don't see what you have against women's ambitions, Dad."

"Did anybody ask you to see?" Mr. Randall inquired a shade tartly because he wanted to go on reading. "Must you understand *everything* at sixteen?"

"I think it's most important for Jessie to understand," and Mrs. Randall snipped forcefully at her darning yarn. "She has ambitions herself."

Jess sat up straighter at this unsuspected recognition of her hopes by her mother.

"I trust she has," Mr. Randall remarked dryly. "I hope

JESS

that she is ambitious to finish the school year as capably as she has tackled it so far. I hope that she is ambitious to be a real help to you this summer. But I shall be dismayed if she is ambitious to fly the Pacific Ocean or head the Department of Labor in Washington."

"Oh, Dad! Finishing school and helping mother aren't ambitions," Jess groaned. "Those things are what you *do*. Ambitions are what you *want* to do."

"They are if they are in your line," Mr. Randall announced. "Otherwise they are follies . . . Which brings us back to where I started with your mother." He picked up the *Times*. Then Jess's tone gave him an afterthought. "Just what are these ambitions of yours, Jess? If school and helping your mother aren't things you 'want to do,' what is it you do want? "

"Jessie didn't say she didn't want to do them," Mrs. Randall cut in. "Who's getting off the track now? "

"Just the same Jess implied that there were further demands beckoning. I'd be interested to know them, Jess."

"I can't tell you, exactly, Dad," Jess said. How was it possible to display all her most private longings in public like a catch of fish? Especially when her father was in a critical mood.

"I believe Jessie would be contented for the moment if she were the star guest on a coast-to-coast radio broadcast,

JESS STARTS SOMETHING

wouldn't you, dear?" Mrs. Randall believed that her slight cruelty in baring Jess's dreams was the kindest thing to do, for her daughter's ambitions, only partly guessed, did not seem wholesome to her. "Or must it be Hollywood, starring with Mickey Rooney, Jessie?"

Jess was annoyed by this disloyalty on the part of her mother, to whom she had just come as reinforcements, but she was still more perturbed by its effect on her father and could only say hotly, "Mother, don't be silly!"

Mr. Randall's eyes were on his daughter's face which had become a somewhat flushed mask, and his attitude underwent a change. Instead of the teasing husband he became the interested father, seriously concerned with his daughter's welfare. "Don't misunderstand me, Jess," he said kindly. "I'm all for your having ambitions. Life would be nothing without them. But you are the half-grown offspring of, I regret to say, very humble parents who live, and expect to continue living, in a charming but out-of-the-world village. I don't say fling away ambition, but I do say examine your ambitions to see whether or not they are delusions of grandeur."

Mrs. Randall nodded her head over her work as if the phrase stated her own opinion perfectly.

Mr. Randall went on, "You are exposed, I know, to the summer colony . . ."

JESS

"Oh, Dad, don't bring them in!" Jess exclaimed, for Bill Wolverton belonged to the summer colony.

"I've always said that their influence on the community isn't for the best," Mrs. Randall added.

"Let me finish, please." Mr. Randall regained the floor. "The summer colony is a necessity, and people of wealth like the Westvales and the Wolvertons contribute something besides money. But I do hope, Jess, that you have more sense than to want to imitate them. Nothing is more absurd than imitating others, especially the people it can never be in one's power to resemble."

"Then you shouldn't have sent me to school," Jess said acidly. "The first maxim that Miss Tottem made me write out fifty times, simply because I was reading *The Yearling* when she thought I should be studying stuff I already knew, was, 'A man's reach should exceed his grasp.' But I suppose that's wicked in a woman. That's telling you to be ambitious."

Mr. Randall made a gesture of despair. "I wish I could remember my own maxim. I'll write it out five hundred times tonight: *Never argue with a woman*. Haven't I just been telling you to go ahead and have ambitions, but to be sure they're your *own*? My whole point, Jess, is that it's not only silly but heartbreaking to hanker after the decorations

JESS STARTS SOMETHING

that come to other people for being *themselves*. Be your own self and let the acclaim and the publicity fall where they will. Isn't that your idea of it, Mother?" he asked his wife.

Mrs. Randall nodded, since her mouth was full of pins.

"But what if being yourself makes you want just that, Dad?" Jess's voice was husky with her long-brooded desire.

Mr. Randall was learning things. "Is that really your ardent wish? To be on the air or in the headlines? To be talked about?"

Jess was silent, for her father had just about stated her ambition, and his incredulous tone showed how little he thought of it. She could not say "yes" and risk having her dreams torn to tatters, and she was too honest to say "no." Mrs. Randall, noticing her disappointment, said: "Never mind, child. Your father probably wanted to be President when he was a boy, and got over it."

Mr. Randall again lifted the *Times*. "I much preferred to marry you and have a nice home and a brilliant daughter," he said soothingly. "Jess, do we have to have that noise if you're not going to listen to it?"

"I've been listening, all the while," Jess said. "Didn't you hear Mr. Levant answer those questions on the piano? It was wonderful. But I'll relieve you of it. I have something else to do."

JESS

Jess turned off the radio and went up to her room. She was not angry, precisely, but deeply disturbed. It had been a horrid day: First, seeing more clearly than ever the cages that Mr. Struthers and Miss Simpson lived in so contentedly. Then having her wings snipped at once more by Miss Tottem. And then to realize that her own family disapproved! The worst of all! But they couldn't down her. None of them. She'd be herself with a vengeance, and the best way was to start at once. She'd complete those questions about the three insects now. She'd make them so marvelously impossible that even Mr. Kieran would give up. She'd win not only the ten dollars and the whole *Encyclopædia Britannica* but the admiration of Maine Point and her father. She'd do something so preposterous and dramatic that *We, the People* would have to invite her to appear. And it wouldn't seem absurd to her father then. She'd prove him wrong on every count. Yes, even about the diary. As if a woman couldn't keep a diary! She'd keep a diary!

A thrill ran over her at this inspiration. A secret diary to confront him with later. She had just the book for it, too.

Jess began to hunt in the bottom drawer of her desk. She would start it this minute. Jess was not the person to hesitate over beginnings. Bringing up a large blankbook which she had once begged from her father on a visit to his office, she turned to the flyleaf and wrote in her round legible hand:

JESS STARTS SOMETHING

"THE DIARY OF PATRICIA RANDALL

"(Utterly Private)"

Then, on page one, she set down the date and began:

"This day I begin a new era in my life. I start being myself as Father so unconsciously advises. I also start this diary which he says is impossible. I shall write in it daily for five years. I promise myself not to miss one single day. I promise to set down the truth about myself, bad or good, without sparing . . ."

"Jessie!" It was her mother calling from downstairs.

"Yes, Mother?"

"Mr. William Wolverton . . . to see you."

NATURAL HISTORY: BOY

3



Jess went quicksilver all over at this incredible announcement.

Bill Wolverton in town? Calling on *her*? What unheard-of intervention of Providence had brought about anything so immensely and completely marvelous?

"I'll be right down," she called. Slapping the newborn diary shut, Jess ripped out of her school dress. What luck he hadn't caught her downstairs in *that*!

Never had the living room seemed so choked with homeliness and half-worn family things than when Jess entered it, ten minutes later, to find the Princeton sophomore conversing with her father and mother.

As Bill rose, Jess saw that he had grown measurably in the seven months since last September. Not in height; he had always been tall, it seemed to her. Nor in weight, exactly. But his way of standing had more maturity. He was even better-looking, if possible. His blue eyes had a more direct look. His smile was not quite so boyish. His hand shake, she had remembered, was sincere, and it was now. And his

NATURAL HISTORY: BOY

voice had those warm overtones of friendliness in it which had made their talk last summer so palpitating a memory to Jess. Now, she realized, the news her mother had called up to her was more incredible than ever. No one like this had ever entered their home, and he had come to call on her! Thoughts flew so fast that she had time to wish that Minnie Treadwell could see this.

Only one shadow fell on the call. Bill was in camp clothes, flannel shirt and knickers, and one stocking torn by briars. If Jess felt subtly disappointed that the call was not formal, she forgot it in the genuine heartiness of his greeting and the appraisal of her own appearance.

"But, Bill," Jess exclaimed after the first volley of civilities, "how do you have a vacation now? I pictured you boning the history of the Middle Ages."

"There are ways and ways," the sophomore said tantalizingly. "Don't remind me of the Middle Ages. Wait till I show you something important."

He slipped into the hall and was back with a creel. He opened this wicker basket reverently and let her peek.

"Oh, Bill!" Her admiring wonder satisfied even him as she gazed at the large brook trout lying regally on its couch of ferns. Its size was impressive to the experienced angler, and its jeweled coloring had not yet dimmed. Mr. Randall had risen to peer into this casket. Mrs. Randall, too, uttered the

JESS

requisite exclamations, although a fish was to her a fish rather than an object of veneration. Then she excused herself to make some cocoa.

"But *where* did you get it?" Jess gasped.

"Alder Brook. Do you remember the pool you told me about last summer? The one with the outcrop of black rocks? You said you'd be willing to be a cliff dweller if you could live there."

Jess nodded, happy because he remembered what she had said. "Did it take long?"

"Oh, hours. Days. You're looking now at an old and withered man. I lived years in that tussle." His grin was adorable, Jess thought. She loved any person who didn't talk like the inhabitants of Maine Point. They reminded her of a conversational cash register. Drop a remark into one of them and the stupid little bell in his brain rang up precisely the answer you knew it would.

"Tell me about it, Bill, from the very first," Jess begged.

At this point Mr. Randall excused himself on the plea of having a law case to go over, and Jess was left alone to entertain her young man.

This required the minimum of hostessing on her part. Bill had swallowed her invitation to talk about his triumph as completely as the trout had taken the hook. Jess listened eagerly for a while, then she became conscious of a lessening

NATURAL HISTORY: BOY of Foreign Missions

of that eagerness. She wished that he would get through with the trout and remember her. It began to annoy her that this radiant young man, who had not seen her since last summer, and so fleetingly then, should be so entranced by his exploit that he considered her only as something to talk into, like a telephone receiver. Even the arrival of Mrs. Randall and the cocoa did not change the subject of conversation. Then, when the fish had been hooked, played, almost lost a dozen times, then landed, weighed, compared, and praised, Bill set down his empty cup and rose.

"That went to the spot, Mrs. Randall. I'd like to return the favor. I want you to keep my fish. I'm sure he'd value being eaten by people who appreciate him."

"Oh, but we couldn't deprive you of such a trophy," Mrs. Randall exclaimed. "I do appreciate your kindness, Mr. Wolverton, but surely you should enjoy it on your own table."

"That's not a one-man dish, Mrs. Randall. I couldn't bear to see it wasted. No, I want you to have it."

"Then you must come and enjoy it with us. Tomorrow evening."

Jess's spirits rose at that, for it was just what she was hoping her mother would say. How wonderful to have Bill as a guest in her home! Who knew, perhaps he would invite her to his next summer. Beautiful vistas opened before Jess's imagination as rapidly as lightning forks and branches.

JESS

"I wish I could, Mrs. Randall, but I've an errand that must be done." He took a step toward the door.

"But you can't go yet," Jess said with a tightening throat.

"I'm afraid I must. I just thought you'd want to see." He had reached the door. "Please say good night to Mr. Randall for me."

Jess went cold with a sort of fury. He had not come to call on her at all! He'd come to exhibit a fish, to talk for an hour about his prowess as fisherman. That over, he was going! Not one word about her winter, her hopes. And *she* had been holding mental dialogues with him every day since he'd waved to her from his shining car last autumn. And he was so polite, too, remembering the good night to her father. It wasn't because of lack of manners. It was lack of interest.

"Thanks so much, Bill," Jess said, because she would have had every tooth extracted slowly and without novocain rather than divulge her furious disappointment. Her voice sounded so strange that Mrs. Randall stroked her head and said in a manner that almost destroyed Jess, "My little girl sounds sleepy."

"Good night, Mrs. Randall. Good night, Jess." And he was gone.

Jess insisted on washing the cocoa cups alone. She had never been one to share her woes and wished to escape from her mother's eyes before her mood was guessed. When she

NATURAL HISTORY: BOY

crept up to her room and saw the school dress, which she had tossed on the bed, it reminded her pitifully of the joyous lightness she had felt when she had flown from the room to meet Bill. Now she could cry, except that tears were so useless, so stupid. They got your eyes stinging and your nose stopped up for nothing. She noticed her diary left out for anyone to see. That mustn't happen again.

Well, she considered as she undressed slowly, she had something in the diary, a real friend who couldn't go back on her. *It* had to listen to her. *It* couldn't go out the door and leave her like this. She opened to its natal sentences. "I promise to set down the truth about myself, bad or good, without sparing . . ."

She took up her pen and wrote:

". . . myself. I am going to learn *all* about myself just as if I were a house I'd moved into. I am like one. I have an exterior which everyone who passes me on the street can see. They look at the front and the back, the sunny side and the side in the shade. But how much of me can they know from that? Very little. They can't even tell how many rooms I have, or what I have stored in my attic or in the cellar. *He*, for instance, never guessed.

"But I must know *everything*. I must know all my furnishings, mental and spiritual. I must know just what

JESS

each window looks out on. I must watch what comes into my house. And when I know all, I must be careful not to talk too much about it. People who talk too much about themselves can be sickening, as I have just discovered. You will have to put up with it, diary, but from now on, I shall mostly let others talk about *themselves*. That will be a game I can play with myself. It keeps them happy.

"I am feeling a bit better already. I was very angry at *him* a few minutes ago. But now I am really grateful because he has shown me how to make him happy. Thanks, unmentioned one! Someday you will be talking to me again, in a way you don't expect, and glad to listen, too. Good night, good night."

Jess closed the diary amazed at the change in her feelings. She had entered the room rebellious and almost in tears. Now she felt almost buoyant again, and thanks to the diary that her father said a woman couldn't keep. Thoughts flowed through her on the current of her new resolve. She was tempted to start another entry.

Jess woke in a room that might have been the heart of a golden cloud. Then she saw why. The summer fog had thinned and was being turned by the sun into a vapor like

NATURAL HISTORY: BOY

the dust of buttercups. The blue shone through from above. It was going to be a glorious day, and it was Saturday.

Jess ran over in her mind the things she had to do. In the eight days since Bill had displayed his trout, the diary had grown by several pages and Jess had become much clearer to herself. Complete honesty with oneself was like an unexplored woods trail; it brought you out at queer places. Candor hurt, like iodine on a raw place; but it cured. But best of all, if you thought, step by step, you occasionally had a notable revelation, such as last night when she had written:

"I see now how foolish I have been. You can't expect to impress a person by something out of his line. Take Miss Malvinia, who has to teach history to a lot of clumsy students. I couldn't impress her by solving geometry originals in my head. She wouldn't care. But she'd think I was wonderful if I could reel off a list of Napoleon's old battles correctly. And the same with *him*. Suppose he had given me a chance to talk. What could I have said that would have impressed him? Nothing. If I had said that I had just baked my first perfect angel-food cake, it wouldn't have meant anything because he takes good cooking for granted. No, you can only astonish a fisherman by catching a larger fish! I certainly have been *dumb*."

JESS

Jess worked with a concentration and speed that morning which surprised her mother. No daydreaming slowed up her sweeping or spoiled her muffins. On Saturdays her father came home for lunch. Jess liked to have something especially tasty for that meal. Now she noticed that he, too, took almost perfect cooking for granted. She wondered what she would have to do to impress her father. He was not very impressive.

"What's on the carpet this afternoon, Jess?" he asked.

"Something outdoors, I hope," Mrs. Randall said. "Jess has worked like a Trojan all morning."

Mr. Randall laughed. "There's a question for your *Information, Please*, Jess. 'How hard did a Trojan work? And what at?'"

"Mr. Kieran would know, Dad. The only question I've ever heard him miss was the date of his wife's birthday."

"Isn't that just like a man!" Mrs. Randall observed. "What are you going to do, dear? It would be nice if you went over to see Mrs. Briggs. You might be able to help her with something. Eddie is so enthusiastic over his new Scout work that he's off in the woods most of the time. He's crazy about it, she says."

"Eddie would be," Mr. Randall remarked. "He's another one of these natures who never take their enthusiasms by halves. I suppose he starts the stove by rubbing sticks together, eats porcupines, and sleeps up in a tree."

NATURAL HISTORY: BOY

"Is that a slap at me?" Jess inquired.

"Isn't that just like a woman!" Mr. Randall sounded grave but Jess saw the sly smile in his eyes.

Mrs. Randall didn't and asked, "Now what would you be meaning by that, Elbert?"

"Oh, Mother, don't even notice him!" Jess cried. "Dad's only feeling good."

"A funny way to show it," Mrs. Randall sniffed.

"How true! How true!" Mr. Randall gave a mock sigh. "If I say the moon looks pale, a woman rushes to her mirror. She takes every remark personally, as if directed at her."

"Well, I'm sure men aren't very different," Mrs. Randall said. "I've seen you walk out of the house in a huff because I said we'd have to get somebody to rake the leaves. You took it right to yourself."

Jess laughed. "You'd both better stop there while you're even."

"I think we must have got off the subject," Mr. Randall said, smiling. "What I've been leading up to is an invitation. I have an errand near the Westlakes', which I am certain that Jess knows is near the Wolvertons', and I wondered, Jess, if you could be cajoled, persuaded, argued, or perhaps threatened into going with me." Mr. Randall winked at his wife.

"I think not, Dad. Thanks just the same."

JESS

Both parents looked at Jess more pointedly than intended.

"Why, you know you always like to be with your father," Mrs. Randall said. "And if you should see your friend, you could tell him how much we enjoyed the trout."

"I know, Mother," and Jess rose to remove the plates. "It's very nice of Dad to think of it, but it just happens that I've a little errand of my own this afternoon."

"Perhaps you have a message I could give him if I see him," Mr. Randall said with another not very well-guarded wink.

"I may have a message for him later," Jess said mysteriously. "Mother, if I'm not back in time to start supper, will you?"

"Certainly, dear. But I would like to know where you're going."

"She'll tell us after she's been there," Mr. Randall said promptly. Jess loved her father for that. His quick perception of her stood by her in a pinch. Her heart sang now as she carried out the dishes. Yes, indeed, she was going to have a message for Bill, she hoped, and if she couldn't catch one, she didn't want him to know about her efforts.

Mid-afternoon was lovely on Alder Brook, even if it was not the happiest time for trout fishing. The woodland stream was a succession of amber-colored pools connected by

NATURAL HISTORY: BOY

stretches of still water. It had come far through an unspoiled forest and, as if it knew that it was soon to be lost in the sea, it made itself beautiful to show the forest what it was losing.

Jess had set her mind upon catching a bigger fish than Bill's and she was determined that it must be caught in Alder Brook. She had cut across the woods to meet it about a mile and a half from the ocean and was fishing downstream. The day was warm for May and the trout were well fed by spring insects and lazy. Pool after pool yielded nothing, not a rise.

Jess was an experienced angler. However impulsive and impatient she might be at home with the restrictions which life in Maine Point loved to heap up around a girl, she was calm and patient in the soothing solitude of the great woods. Her fiftieth cast was as measured and careful as her first. The business of fishing is to go forward confidently, never irritable, never discouraged, always ready for the winning strike. To a true fisherman, the eternal variety of streamside and flowing water are almost enough; that, and hope.

As time seeped along Jess was glad that she had told no one. By fishing downstream she had arranged it so that this hope might grow more and more instead of less and less, for the pools grew larger as the sea was neared. But now there were only two before brackish water in which no self-respecting



JESS

trout would live: Perilous Pool, so called because of its casting difficulties, and Black Pool, where Bill had caught his.

Perilous Pool rewarded her most skillful effort with the loss of a hook. Biting back her disappointment, Jess breasted the bushes down the still water and stalked Black Pool. This place was the gift of the wood gods to all anglers who had been very good all their lives and, incidentally, had learned how to fish with such skill as only a great inborn desire to fish gave one the patience to acquire. For this was where the sophisticated trout lay, the great big-bellied trout who had taken their degrees. All of them were M.A.'s (master of anglers), and most were Ph.D.'s (doctor of " phishosophy ") as well. For every red speckle on their proud sides they could recite a warning or a maxim taught them in the training pools above. They could find flaws in all the common sayings, such as, " When the wind's in the south it blows the bait into the fishes' mouths." Nothing was going to blow bait into their grim, and often scarred, mouths unless they could prove there was nothing fishy about it. They knew a phony lure ten feet up. They had grown into three-pounders by being cynical about all bait and most feathered attractions. " Look for the hook " was the first thing their mothers had taught them and the last thing they remembered at night. Once every so often a youngster got carried down into Black Pool, which was the old men's club of the whole river, and he'd float around looking into the marvelous caverns, refreshing himself above

NATURAL HISTORY: BOY

the cold springs entering from the bottom, and decide to stay. But he never had the patience, like the old boys, to be too wary. He had never learned how to inspect, to doubt, to refuse. His mouth would water at the first bent worm he saw. If one of the authorities cautioned him, he'd say, "Hook, your granddad! I don't believe there is any such thing ez hooks." So he did not disturb the great pool long.

It was to this retreat of the elders that Jess brought her final hopes. The upper end was a cold caldron kept seething by a small but active waterfall. Its bubbles winked out before they obscured the trout's favorite lurking places. There was always one trout here, Jess told herself, always *one*, and this she must have.

Slowly, scarcely disturbing the alders, who were tattletales and loved nothing better than to wave green signals to watchful eyes in the brown shadows, Jess planted her feet and cast. The line, missing the drooping branches of the hemlocks overhead, fell on the water where Jess had planned, near Gibraltar, a black upthrust of rock where the water was deepest.

She began drawing the lure tantalizingly toward her. Even the oldest and most sapient trout would have sworn that this brown hackle was alive and would be very toothsome. Yet she had drawn the fly back two thirds of the practicable distance and was about to lift it for a second cast before it happened. A swirl, a strike! It was all instantaneous, auto-

JESS

matic. The girl's wrist gave a dragging jerk. She felt a weight, a violent tug, a vicious downward pull. Bracing herself knee against knee, she gave the fish his head. This was no ordinary trout. No trout that size with that impetuosity and strength had ever sojourned in or even visited Black Pool.

He had reached the end of his watery living room and was sulking. Jess began reeling in very cautiously, for she knew that the struggle was still to come. The hook in the fish's jaw reminded him of the uncomfortable fact that he was not his own master. This was a surprise, an indignity, an imposition. It must be ended. Whereupon he started to tear around the pool. It was all right as a clubroom but too small for an arena. Finding the lower entrance, he darted through it and was off downstream.

Jess stepped into the open. No need of concealment now. He must be allowed his head, or he'd pull that slim piece of barbed steel from the bone. Yet he must not be privileged too far. It was a long way to the sea and she could not keep up. So, feeling out the correct pressure, she began to discipline him. By now Jess's heart was beating all over her body. This was the Olympic game of fishing. To land this monster would be to win Bill's admiration forever. To lose him was to lose everything. Such a chance would never come twice.

The great fish had changed his mind and was rushing back.

NATURAL HISTORY: BOY

Jess reeled in furiously. She caught sight of him for the first time in the narrows, long and mysterious and dark. Six pounds, eight pounds maybe, and the biggest trout that Bill had ever caught was this last, not quite three and a half pounds.

Once more the fish reached the turmoil of water beneath the little fall and stopped to reflect. He was tireder now. Yet . . . that blessed hook! He must rid himself of that. With a violent outrush he charged once more downstream. But this time not so far, and Jess's heart leaped. She was his master. If the hook held and she made no clumsy mistakes . . . But don't count one's fishes, she said to herself. Live in each minute and have patience.

Patience. The alders waited. The sun, unable to wait, moved on. Jess's arm ached up to the shoulder. She was tiring, too, and little fronds of fear began to curl inside her. She was afraid at last, for he was so near, yet still uncaptured.

All things come to an end, even so epic a struggle as Jess had had on her hands for half an hour. At last her nerve and skill and patience drew their reward. He had ceased to remonstrate as she towed him slowly toward her landing net. Piloting him firmly into its arc with her right hand, she brought the woven scoop in front. Swish! He was in, safe. Wheeling, she held him over the sand.

Now she saw for sure what she had already guessed. He

JESS

was no trout, but a salmon. A wanderer adventuring up Alder Brook from the sea, a youngster, thoughtless and magnificent. Lifting him from the net, she disentangled the hook and . . .

" Boo! "

The wearied girl, startled by this clap of noise and by the half-apprehended bulk of a boy jumping at her from the bushes, jerked to her feet.

" You scare easy! " and Eddie Briggs, in Scout uniform, a taunting smile all over his round face, stood there gloating.

Anger gushed up in Jess. " I could slap you for that! " she cried, aware of trembling after being so tense from her long struggle. " Now jump into the bush again and take your silly face home."

" Who says so? "

" And hand back that uniform. You're not fit to wear it."

" Stuck-up! "

" Oh, go 'way." Jess turned away from this senseless exchange to pick up her prize. And it wasn't there! It was gone!

An instant of paralyzing blankness, and then the anguish of comprehension. The salmon had flopped back into the pool. It was lost. Her life's one chance to get even, and more than even, with Bill's exploit was lost. And all because this

NATURAL HISTORY: BOY

Humpty Dumpty of an Eddie Briggs had startled her out of her senses.

"Now, see what you've made me do!" she cried, whirling on the astonished Eddie. "You've lost me the biggest fish that was ever caught in Alder Brook, you . . . *you* . . ."

Eddie caught the menace in her despair and stepped back. He was still rankling at her saying that he was unfit to be a Scout. Now he saw his revenge and said, "You never had a fish . . . You're just making that up."

This was insolence heaped upon injury. "How *dare* you be so horrid!" Jess's glance would have scorched him to a piece of toast if her eyes could have touched him. "I hooked a fish as long as my arm and landed him and there are the marks on the sand. That's how long he was."

Eddie had put a large log between him and the furious girl, so he decided to bait her some more. "Shucks, anybody can make marks on the sand. That don't mean nothing. I guess I could catch a fish *twenty* feet long if drawin' marks on the sand was all that was needed to prove it."

"You don't *believe* me?" Jess's voice rose to a point as sharp as a hook.

"I heard you tell whoppers before," Eddie retorted. "How about the 'wolfogs' you scared Sadie Martin with? Those kind of wolves you said studied frogs till they seen how

JESS

to jump like 'em and so was able to chase a body twicet as fast as before."

"They were just something I made up and you know it," Jess flung back at him heatedly. "I was practicing on Sadie for that *Tall Story Hour* on the radio."

"You got a better story in that fish," and Eddie forced a laugh. "You must've practiced a lot to get that good."

"But I *caught* it, I tell you. I landed it." Exasperation was making Jess almost inarticulate. "It'd be there now if you hadn't jumped at me."

"Like a 'wolfog,'" Eddie chimed in. He was enjoying this. It was rare when he had Jess in a corner and he knew it.

"But you *saw* it. You know you did," Jess continued and a new fear was cold in her.

"I didn't see no fish," Eddie said with as straight a face as his applelike features could compass.

"You did! You couldn't *help* seeing it."

"I seen you bending over making marks in the sand," Eddie said. "I thought you was an ostritch. And if you go to tellin' that story around as how you caught a trout three yards long in this pool, I got to tell 'em the truth. I'm a Scout now and I guess they'll believe me first."

"Eddie Briggs!" Jess caught fire as she visioned her only witness to her booty going around Maine Point denying

NATURAL HISTORY: BOY

that she had ever caught anything. "If you *do* such a thing . . ."

"What?" Eddie glanced behind him to be sure of escape.

Jess saw and knew there was only one safe course. To catch the little fiend and knuckle him until he screamed repentance and promised. She darted.

But it is the primary duty of Boy Scouts to be prepared. Eddie, well aware he was playing with fire, jumped, vanished into the dense thicket of alders, and scuttled away under their cover like a fiddler crab. Jess was handicapped by his start and the log, also by her superior height, not to mention her hair and clothes. Eddie was no novice to the woods and, despite his chubbiness, fairly nimble. The underbrush was a jungle.

After five minutes of blind chase, Jess stopped, breathless and half lost. She listened. No sound of Eddie. It was hopeless. Furious, with a side pain, and a vaster ache where the satisfaction of the fish should have been, she groped her way to the stream and followed it down to the pool. It was useless trying to fish there any more after all the turmoil. It was growing late, too. So, gathering up rod and net and creel, she went home heart-heavy.

Even the release of telling her tale of woe to her father was denied her, he having been detained, and Jess, after some interior debate, decided not to unbosom to her mother. Mrs.

JESS

Randall would be sympathetic but in a vague and maddening way, for the size of fish ranked low among her interests, and Jess decided to keep her wrath for her diary.

When the dishes were done and everything put in order for the Sabbath, Jess went upstairs and closed the door.

"May 10

"If I were the guest at *Information, Please* next Friday and Mr. Fadiman asked me what were the most exasperating things on earth, I'd know all three: fathead Eddie Briggs, losing my biggest fish through no fault of my own, and being teased when you desperately want to be serious.

"I could choke Eddie. He *must* have seen my fish and I just know he is going to tell everybody I'm making it up. I wouldn't care so much if it weren't *so* unjust and if I simply didn't have to beat *him*. Now even *he* may not believe me, and that would hurt more than losing all the fish in Christendom. Oh, *please* believe me!

"I decided walking home that I would never tease anyone again unless I'm sure they know I'm teasing, which is nice sometimes, like being tickled, only not too much. I used to tease Sadie Martin because she was so dumb, but I see that's as silly now as Eddie jumping out of the alders and scaring me half to death. I could tease *him*, a very little. Maybe you have to be very, very fond of a person to tease him and then

NATURAL HISTORY BOY Board of Foreign Missions

it would be a kind of indirect way of showing how much faith you have in him, because you would know he didn't mind it. Love is like a layer cake. You have a layer of love, and a layer of trust and admiration and hope, and then you might have just a thin spreading of jelly teasing, or no, teasing would be the taste of lemon in the icing. But never, never any disbelief or injustice. They would be poison.

"I wish Eddie would hurry up and run away to sea, as he boasts he will do. He . . ."

Through the closed door Jess heard her mother calling. "Yes, Mother! What is it?"

"Mrs. Briggs is on the phone. It's about Eddie. He hasn't come home yet and it's 'way after dark. I don't suppose you've seen him anywhere?"

Jess sighed. Was that boy always going to interrupt everything she was doing? "Yes, Mother, I saw him. In the woods up Alder Brook."

"Maybe you'd better come down and talk to her, dear."

"All right, Mother." Jess closed her diary and the funny side struck her. The Boy Scout lost four miles from home! The smarty! It would be hard not to laugh into the phone. Poor Mrs. Briggs! She was probably worried. Well, she ought to worry with an idiot son like Eddie.

Jess pattered down the stairs and took the phone.

THE INTERVIEW

4



Jess's impulse to laugh at the plight of Boy Scout Briggs evaporated at the first tearful sound of his mother's voice on the phone. Jess had a heart of many rooms, as her diary indicated, and kindness was one of the larger. Mrs. Briggs's fears brought to the girl at once a picture of the farm, the sign TOURISTS, the hard-working woman, and in a few seconds Jess was pitying her.

She tried to be as comforting as possible. "Please don't worry, Mrs. Briggs," she begged after sketching in what had occurred with complete omission of any complaint of Eddie. "He couldn't really be lost. . . . No, no, you know as well as I do that there's nothing in the whole woods to hurt him. . . . No, it would be a good experience for him to spend the night alone. It's not cold now and the sun gets up early. I expect he may walk in on you any moment now. But if he doesn't it's because he's sensible. He probably got confused in all that undergrowth and sat down, just as they tell Scouts

THE INTERVIEW

to do, you know, until he got the picture of where he was straightened out in his mind. Besides, he can always follow water down to the bay. If he's done that, he'd be this late anyway. You go to bed and think of Eddie enjoying his little adventure. Tomorrow he'll be the hero of Maine Point. . . . Of course, Mrs. Briggs. We all will. Everybody will hunt. But I know it won't be necessary. So good night, and I'll call you first thing in the morning."

As Jess went back to her diary she thought of her words to Mrs. Briggs, "Tomorrow he'll be the hero of Maine Point." What had made her say such a thing? Tomorrow Eddie, she devoutly hoped, would be the butt of every corner gathering, the laughingstock of everyone who could laugh at a fat little nuisance in Boy Scout togs. She was relieved, too, by his predicament, for now he would not have the nerve to run around denying her fish story. It served him good and right.

Sunday morning, however, brought neither peace nor Eddie back to Mrs. Briggs. On the way to church Jess heard the boy's name mentioned oftener than she liked. Jess had a somewhat different opinion of the church hour than most of the boys and girls to whom it was something you scrubbed up for, sat through, and were glad it was over for another week. To Jess the service was hardly a springboard into that other world of the spirit which Mr. Meekom so earnestly recommended. Jess, on that sunny morning of May 11, was

JESS

still deeply entangled in the labyrinth of herself and her ambitions. She enjoyed going to church, however, for two reasons. The little edifice, the gift of some wealthy summer residents, was the most beautiful church, or any other building for that matter, that Jess had ever seen. And it had been set in a grove of evergreens — dark firs, broad feathery hemlocks, gray-barked spruces, and brooding white pines — which seemed to keep it apart from the petty rasping life of Maine Point. Just to approach it gave sensitive Jess a thrill, and to sit in that first quiet before the service was almost a prayer.

The other reason for Jess's anticipation of the hour lay in her ability to transfer herself to the shoes of the elevated. Mr. Meekom's elevation was very slight, in her opinion. His fame was limited and debatable. But when he stood there above them, earnest, commanding at least quiet and the facial attention of most, Jess had to concede him a certain eminence. He even had a sort of borrowed power, for when, occasionally, she listened and gave herself up to the meaning of his words, her familiar world faded and grew small and unimportant as if looked at from a great distance. The trouble, for Jess, with Mr. Meekom's sermons was their insistence on humility, on giving oneself to Christ utterly. The whole tide of Jess's being was set in the other direction. She did not want to be humble. She yearned for the very oppo-

THE INTERVIEW

site — distinction, the thrill of being a celebrity. She had every intention of being good. The moment that people acknowledged her eligibility for fame, she planned to practice every virtue. She would be generous, affable, helpful to the less gifted, yes, even humble. She would overlook Miss Tottem's blindness and Minnie Treadwell's spiteful envy and the village's total lack of recognition gladly, forgivingly. But to be humble *now* — it was really too much to ask.

On this still Sabbath morning Jess's acceptance of Mr. Meekom's sermon was very different from what he intended. He was preaching on the eternal validity of the Golden Rule, and Jess agreed with him. Her thought ran in this wise: Now if Eddie had practiced the Golden Rule yesterday afternoon, he wouldn't be in this fix. If, instead of jumping out and scaring me, he had been decent enough to admire my fish and offer to help me carry it and my things home, he'd not only never've been lost, but we would have turned over a new leaf, probably, and been friends, and later on I could help him. Suppose I win this \$25,000 prize. I wouldn't forget him, because after all Eddie doesn't have a terribly good time and has nothing much to look forward to. It would be a pleasure . . . But of course *he* never for one instant in his life has asked himself whether he should do unto me as he would that I should do unto him . . .

Her reflection was broken into by Mr. Meekom's, "Let

JESS

us pray." Jess bowed her head and listened. Suddenly she was startled, for the minister's low impressive voice was saying: "And, Father, grant us the safe return of our lost child, Edward Briggs. Even as thou didst feed Elijah in the wilderness by ravens, comfort our dear boy with the assurance of thy presence and guide him back to his waiting mother . . ."

Jess would not have labeled the uncomfortable feeling in her as jealousy, but it was. To be prayed for in public! This would change everything. When Eddie came back, people would now consider him differently. They'd think God had had a hand in his return and that certainly would give even Eddie Briggs a distinction it would take some time to wear off. It was so unjust! He probably was hiding out in the woods just to get talked about, the smarty!

As Jess walked out of the church, scraps of conversation ratified her anticipations. "Such a nice boy . . ." ". . . his mother's right hand, poor child." ". . . so considerate!"

Jess bit her lip and stood apart, unnoticed, in the sunlight waiting for her mother. The men in the congregation had gathered into a group, evidently discussing the situation. Maine Point was accustomed to all the vicissitudes of sea and forest. Its families were equally expert with a fishing dory and a lumberman's ax. They might have a radio in the parlor but they had pioneer talk in the kitchen. Generations

THE INTERVIEW

of exposure to nor'easters and the different dangers of the wilderness inland had kept their nerves steady. No one grew jumpy if a child was late to supper or a husband detained overnight. But when a danger to one of the community became actual, they knew what to do.

Presently Sheriff Poulson came over to Jess. "You're the girl I was looking for, Jess. A few of us are going over to the brook to take a look for Eddie this afternoon, and I thought maybe you'd like to come and show us just where he run."

"I'd like to, Mr. Poulson," Jess said with a slight lifting of her depression at this notice. "I can't imagine how he could be lost so long."

"Nor me. You was both on this side of the brook, you say, and if he stayed to this side, the worst he could do'd be to circle about some, like they do. Of course if he was fool enough to cross over and get mixed up in the real bush over Nameless Pond way, that mightn't be so nice. Findin' a kid there'd be like huntin' a cat in a cornfield."

"Oh, he wouldn't do that," Jess said, thinking such a mistake beyond even the Eddie Briggs intellect. "He's a Boy Scout, you know. They have to have *some* sense to get in, don't they? "

"Can't count on much sense when you get bush scared, Jess. No, what I'm afear'd's happened is when he started

JESS

runnin' from you, he might've stumbled in some hole'r other and hurt his leg. What were you doin', pullin' a gun on him?" The sheriff's brown face widened a little with a smile.

The joke did not make Jess comfortable. It would be sickening if people began to think Eddie's disappearance was her fault. Yet she had not mentioned the fish episode. Now her mother came up and the sheriff said, "I'll stop by for you, Jess, after dinner."

"I'll be very glad to do what I can," Jess said.

It was a tired girl who opened her diary that night. But she had not missed a day and did not intend to. She wrote:

May 11

"Eddie has managed to stay lost 24 hours. I don't see how it's possible unless he is hurt. The sun has been bright all day. Water runs to the sea. The only explanation I can think of is that Eddie caught sight of himself in the mirror of some pool and could not tear himself away. The Scout uniform is so *cute*.

"Mr. Poulson, Mr. Treadwell, and I lost Eddie's trail after half a mile. He *bad* crossed the brook like an idiot. So Mr. Poulson came back to organize a real hunt. Eddie Briggs is the word everywhere tonight. Even the frogs are saying his name. 'Eddie . . . Bruaggs . . . Eddie

THE INTERVIEW

. . . Bruaggs.' That's fame when you even have the croakers asking for you."

Eddie's fame spread quickly beyond frogs. By Monday noon Jess could hear nothing else. In history, Miss Malvinia stopped the class to comment on what a good sweet boy Eddie had been. Elsie Tanner had to leave the room to wash her eyes. Nothing, thought Jess, shortens the memory so quickly as sympathy. Last week also, she remembered, Elsie had had to wash her eyes on account of Eddie, but it was because of rage. The noble boy had hidden an especially large toad in her desk and it had jumped at her when she opened the lid. Both Elsie and Miss Malvinia had forgotten this.

On her way home after school, Jess saw a bus from which tall and husky youths in Scout uniforms were disembarking. They were Eagle Scouts from Lewiston and Portland! Jess imagined how she would feel if half a dozen splendid-looking young fellows had come part way across the state to rescue her. Why, it would be wonderful!

"What's the latest news?" her mother asked.

"He's still lost, but getting more heroic every hour," Jess said.

Mrs. Randall was not one to detect bitterness in anybody, having so little of it in herself. "Poor Mrs. Briggs! I was just talking to her on the phone. She's almost frantic. So

JESS

many people calling her, too. It'll be in all the newspapers, I imagine. A reporter was out there this morning."

Jess started. This was a new angle. "I don't doubt it," she said without enthusiasm. "If he's not back by tomorrow they'll take George Washington out of the history books and put Eddie in."

"Now, child, what a thing to say!" Mrs. Randall looked at her daughter questioningly.

But any conversation was cut short by an arrival. He was a tall, almost lanky, young man of twenty-four or so, with horn-rimmed glasses and a brisk speech that seemed tired at the same time. Jess saw instantly that he must be from a city; his clothes and manner said city. He touched his hat, asked if her name wasn't Jessie Randall, and then introduced himself as a reporter on the *Times*.

"A reporter?" Jess's heart jumped two inches.

"You get it," the young man said. He sounded as if being a reporter was an agony of dullness.

"How wonderful! I've always wanted to meet a reporter," Jess said. "I can't imagine anything more exciting."

The young man's gaze was penetrating and he pushed his hat back on his head before he said: "That's what you think, sister. Now about this Eddie Briggs. What can you tell me?"

"Oh, lots," Jess said. "Do you want something to take notes on?"

THE INTERVIEW

This remark tired the reporter visibly but he said: "No, you can shoot. If a guy can't take an interview without pulling out a book, he'd better stick to obits."

"What are they? "

"Obituaries, sister. The dead tell no tales, so someone has to do it for 'em. Now what kind of a kid is this Eddie Briggs? "

Jess saw the marvelous opportunity. Here was the chance to prick the Briggs bubble, to show up Eddie as he was, a smarty, a pinheaded pest, a victim of his own wretched joke. And the true story about the fish . . .

"You know him, don't you? " the reporter asked.

"Yes, I know him," Jess said almost vindictively. "Do . . . do you want the truth? "

"What do you think? " the young man repeated. His self-control was evident in every muscle of his face.

"Oh, yes, of course . . . I was thinking . . ." She couldn't do it. It wasn't in her to be so mean. She must "do unto others."

"Eddie's a nice boy," she said, "a real boy, full of spirits. It's wonderful how nice he is to his mother. He helps her a lot, out on their farm, and he's bright, too. He passed all his Scout tests and earned his uniform in spare time. He's full of spirits, Eddie is . . . Oh, I said that. Well, he is. Always playing jokes, like this time he jumped out of the bushes . . ."

JESS

Once started, it was easy to be interviewed. Jess forgot her nervousness as she told about the fish and Eddie's joke — she made it very good-humored on his part — and all that followed. The reporter listened. Jess could see that he was interested. His eyes never left her, and, feeling his appreciation, she recovered her usual buoyancy. He only needed to ask two or three questions when she had finished.

"When do you think it'll come out? The interview. Tomorrow morning?" she asked.

"That's right."

She hated to have him go before she had asked him more about his job. Perhaps reporting was what she would start in doing.

"Could I offer you a drink of anything?" she asked. "We've some new buttermilk, or it'd take only a minute to make some iced tea or lemonade."

"I've got to put this on the wire," he said and, without meeting her eyes again, he left.

Jess felt a moment of pleasant exhaustion, as if she'd put out a great effort, worthily. She was deeply glad that she had said only nice things about Eddie Briggs. She was happier than at any time for a long while.

Mrs. Randall was finishing the dishes when Jess reached the kitchen. "Oh, Mother! I've been interviewed," she

THE INTERVIEW

cried. "And it's to come out tomorrow morning in the *Times*. Isn't that wonderful? I wanted the reporter to stay, though. I had so many things to ask him. But he had to send in the interview."

"It must be a hard life, running around the country talking to strangers," Mrs. Randall observed sympathetically. "I wouldn't care about making a living out of other people's misery myself."

"Oh, but Mother . . ."

"Now, I'd like to do something for Mrs. Briggs. I think I'll bake a big batch of ginger cookies, Jessie. With all those children . . . And you can take them over. I do hope Eddie is safe. I can't get him out of my mind."

That evening Jess went down to the post office for the latest news. There was none, but that did not prevent the men gathering in little groups to discuss the disappearance and say what they'd do if they were in charge of the hunt. Jess was fascinated at hearing Eddie's name on every lip. The strain of waiting had drawn people together, even those who ordinarily were scarcely on speaking terms.

"How *are* you, dear?" Miss Malvinia greeted Jess. "I've been thinking so much of you these last days."

"You have?" Jess was surprised. Miss Malvinia ordi-

JESS

narily was remote. She had been teaching history so long that she lived, Jess felt, in the Middle Ages most of the time. "Why?"

"Because you must be suffering so, my dear. Wasn't it somewhat your fault that Edward ran into the bushes and lost his way? I do not mean to imply that you must feel entirely guilty. But surely you must be more concerned than the rest of us who had no part in the dear boy's disappearance."

Jess had not minded blaming herself, slightly, for this very thing. But it sounded monstrous when someone else said it. "Do you really think I should be blamed for Eddie, Miss Malvinia?" Jess asked hotly.

"Oh, no, no, my dear child! I was merely expressing my sympathy. If he . . . if Edward should fail to return . . ."

"Don't say such a thing, Miss Malvinia. It's impossible." Jess was angrier than ever. Miss Malvinia seemed actually to be relishing the foretaste of tragedy.

"I wouldn't be quite so sure, child. You are not old enough to remember Harvey Thatcher's little girl. They hunted seven days for her. And when they found her . . ." The old woman shook her head dolefully but her eyes were bright.

"If you feel it's so serious, why are you acting as if it was

THE INTERVIEW

a sociable?" Jess demanded. She didn't care whether she was impertinent or not. "I believe you're *enjoying* it!"

"Why, I never heard of such a thing!" Miss Malvinia cried, and she looked around for someone to share her indignation.

Jess looked around, too, and saw a dog — a setter — and then Bill Wolverton. The sight of his shoulders and fine-looking face, so much more alive than the faces of the men around, caught her up like band music. She hurried to him, forgetting entirely that she had been provoked by his preoccupation with his catch. "Oh, Bill, I'm so glad to see you. Miss Malvinia's just been horrid to me. She thinks I'm responsible for Eddie, and of course she'll say so to everybody. I did want to scare him a bit. He scared me so, and then he was going to say I hadn't caught my fish. I haven't told you about that yet. I beat you, Bill. I caught a fish in Alder Brook bigger than you ever *dreamed* of."

Bill laughed at Jess's impetuous change from annoyance to triumph. "Which shall I do first? Sympathize? Or listen to your fish story?"

"It isn't a *story*, Bill. It's true. This is what happened . . ."

"Wait, I'm weak. I've been scouring the bush all day for Eddie. I've got to sit down in the immediate presence of a drink. Shall we say ginger ale? At Cove's?"

JESS

"I'd love to," Jess said, hoping that Minnie Treadwell would be there to see. "Is that your dog?"

"Yes, a new one. Come here, Mac, and meet a lady . . . Mac's short for Mackerel Sky, 'soon wet or soon dry,'" Bill explained. "A very active dog. Must've been a comic who called them setters."

Bill's imagination did to Jess what soda does to water. Her whole evening had been changed, made exciting, by this meeting. It was only a step to Cove's Coffee Shoppe. "Someday I'm going to bring my gun and shoot off that last *p e*." Bill pointed to the sign. "I loathe artificiality. This village is so genuine, like all Maine, that I resent anything fancy or imported, even when it's only spelling. Don't you?"

Jess would like to have said that his genuineness, his realness, was why she adored him, but that had to be left to the diary. An uncomfortable thought smote her. What would Bill think of her calling herself Patricia? Was that being artificial? She couldn't bear to be loathed by Bill. But if Bill understood that she really *was* Patricia . . .

"You don't," Bill said, grinning.

"Excuse me, Bill, I was thinking . . . Of course I do."

He held the screen door open for her and they sat at a table for two. Minnie, unfortunately, wasn't there. After Bill

THE INTERVIEW

had ordered, he said, "Now about that minnow you mentioned . . ."

Jess flashed into her tale. She was released by the delight of sitting opposite this handsome young college man who lived and moved in at least a suburb of the land of her dreams. Her happiness was intensified by his polite attention.

She was too much involved in her own recital of her excitement at hooking the fish, the suspense of playing it, the tragedy of losing it because of Eddie's brattishness, to note how too-polite Bill was. Finally she said, "You do think it was a salmon, don't you, Bill?"

"I'd have to see it, I think." Bill filled his glass again.

"But it could've been, couldn't it? A sort of prodigal son salmon who'd set out to explore Maine instead of keeping on to New Brunswick with the family?"

"You could go far, Jess, with that imagination," came Bill's pronouncement at last. His tone implied that he honored Jess's skill but did not believe one syllable of the story. "You have artistry, fluency, everything. Do you know, I'm still kind of on the lookout for those leaping wolves you told me about last summer. 'Wolfogs,' didn't you call them?"

"Bill!" The meaning of his amused tone broke into Jess's consciousness. "You *believe* me, don't you?"

Bill held up a hand in restraint. "Don't add a word to it,

JESS

not a footnote. Can you imagine the author of *Snow White* tacking a postscript to his immortal fancy, saying, 'You believe this, dear reader, don't you?'

Jess leaned forward, tense with the tremendous necessity of impressing Bill. "I'm telling you the truth, William Grant Wolverton. I caught that fish. It was bigger than it had a right to be, and I was luckier than I had a right to be. But it was real. I haven't added one thing."

"The lady protests too much, methinks," Bill quoted. The truth was that the rather happy-go-lucky sophomore had seen a new personality in this girl with the beautiful red hair and intense eyes. It was impossible for him not to wish to keep her that way a little longer. Besides, a little teasing was coming to her; she certainly had stuck her neck out.

"All right for you, Bill," Jess said decidedly.

He looked at her a little anxiously, for he had no wish to draw tears, yet could not tamely give in to her, either. So he took the defense. "Will you tell me one thing I've said that you can take exception to?" he demanded.

"You don't believe me."

"Did I say so?"

"You said I was telling a fairy story."

"I did not."

"You implied it, then. You did, Bill," she added emphasis as he shook his head hoping he could conceal his smile.

Received from
READER'S SERVICE
Presb. Board of Foreign Missions

THE INTERVIEW

"You said I was like the author of *Snow White*. What is that but implying?"

"I repeat. What an imagination!" Bill was hot in his role. "What a poet is hidden here in Maine Point! Not content with my uncouth but honest words of admiration, you go embroidering them with your own meaning, the way a poet loads up some poor flower with *his* own meaning."

"Do you believe me?" Jess demanded, less heatedly now because the game had become worth more than the candle.

"What more can I say?" Bill replied. "You're not content with my simple avowal."

"You could say, 'Yes.'"

"'Yes,'" Bill repeated, managing to make the word a rounded drop of skepticism.

"You're hopeless," Jess smiled in surrender. She had no idea now whether he believed her or not. But the reporter had, and the interview would be out tomorrow morning. "Would you believe it, Bill, if it came out on the front page of the *Times*?"

Bill caught the ring of accomplishment in her voice. "I might. I didn't know a whale could get on the front page of the *Times*."

"I was interviewed today, Bill," Jess said.

"It's about time New York was becoming aware of you," Bill commented, keeping his face grave. "Miss Jessie Ran-

JESS

dall, the amazing naturalist of Maine Point, discovers the 'wolfogs'!

As happens, Bill had gone a shade too far. "Then you don't believe the interview, either," and Jess's eyes blazed. "Well, you can see tomorrow whether I'm telling the truth or not. That is, if you care enough to look at the paper."

"Jess, please." Bill was instantly contrite. "I honestly believe you, every word you say, and I'll buy a paper in the morning and point with pride . . ."

"There you go again, making fun of me."

"Let's get out of here," Bill suggested. "It's me now who's not getting believed, and I don't like it."

When his voice went deep and gently sincere, like this, a stone would have forgiven him, and before they had gone a block in the cool evening air, Jess was herself again. "Tell me what you did today, Bill. How far did you hunt?"

Bill told of the two dozen men under Sheriff Poulson split into squads to cover all sections of the region. "Eddie could teach those Hindus the vanishing trick," he said. "We combed the country back to Wayward River. I'm getting scared about him. A kid can't stay out indefinitely and be brought back alive."

"I can't believe it yet," Jess said, though Bill's tone had shaken her for the first time. "Why, no Maine Point boy's as helpless as that. There was a city boy lost two years ago

THE INTERVIEW

and he ran and ran in circles until he was crazy with fright. He didn't even eat the berries under his nose. But even he was found. And Eddie's lived here all his life. Oh, Bill, if anything happened to him, and the last words he heard were my scolding, I . . . I couldn't stand it! "

Bill's hand hunted hers swinging beside him and kept it. "I'm a nut, Jess," he said. "First I tease you when you're upset, and then I upset you some more."

"That's all right, Bill." Jess reached a new point of happiness in a breath.

"No, it's dumb. But I won't have you hurting yourself over that scrap with Eddie, and don't go dwelling on what you said. He had more than that coming to him and he's getting it, but it won't be serious. I know it won't. I'm tired and I let that get the better of me for a minute. Promise me you won't think of your scrap. It isn't fair to look at some natural impulsive fact through a magnifying glass. You can turn a beetle into a hippopotamus that way. Come, I'm going to take you home and then go soak myself in boiling water. Come on, Mac. You've got to get fit for tomorrow, too, you old blind nose. He wasn't any good, Jess. I wish I'd bought me a hound."

Jess reached over and rubbed Mackerel Sky's neck the wrong way, then patted his rump, saying that he was a nice dog. The maple-shaded street was fragrant with the dewy

JESS

smell of lawns and the faint presence of unseen flowers. Jess felt better and wished it were farther to her front gate. Jess had gone back to Miss Malvinia and was hoping, aloud, that she wouldn't talk too much, when Bill laughed.

"What's funny about that?" Jess asked.

"Nothing. I was just thinking how much alike you and I are," Bill said, "wishing everybody different. It's my favorite vice. Oh, not very different, but just the way one'd like them. For instance, here I am wishing Mac were a hound, and you wish Miss Malvinia were a discreet woman who held her tongue and counted fifty between remarks, and we both wish Eddie were an experienced woodsman twice his age. And I wish you were a New Yorker so I could see you oftener and take you to games at college, and you wish that I didn't talk so much about myself . . ."

"Why, Bill, what a . . ."

"Don't interrupt this flow of wisdom. We all wish our friends to be changed, detail by detail, until they are precisely right. And suppose it could happen! We'd finally have them all duplicates of ourselves, twins, triplets, quintuplets, like rows and rows of ourselves in a mirror. Wouldn't it be awful? Egotistic as I am, I must say, looking sharply at myself, that one is enough."

Jess laughed aloud for the first time in an hour.

"There you go, laughing when I'm dead serious," Bill

THE INTERVIEW

said with mock severity. "I've even stopped criticizing myself, I'm so anxious not to disturb anything so preciously perfect."

"Bill, stop!" gasped Jess. "I'm getting a stitch in my side."

"What? You don't think I'm perfect?"

Bill's fooling had done to Jess what he intended, lifted her out of the atmosphere of ever-tautening anxiety. He, too, was sorry when they reached the Randall gate. But when she asked him to come in he said he'd better not, for he had to join the searchers early. "I'm going to turn over a new leaf," he said, "about changing people, I mean. It's to be hands off from now on . . . with just one exception," he added half humorously. "There must always be one exception, mustn't there?"

"Who's that? Me?" Jess hated to let the conversation end.

"You know it's not. It's my sister Harriet. Now there's a gal I'd like to see blown into little pieces so that I could put her together again . . . leaving out about half."

"Bill, what an awful thing to say!"

"You don't really know Harriet, do you?"

"I met her on the Sunday School picnic last year. I thought she was very nice."

"A picnic's just where you would meet her," Bill an-

JESS

nounced. "Harriet lives to eat. She regards a day as something to have meals in. Her mind . . . well, it's solid. The best way I can describe it is to say it's like one of those things the ancient Egyptians used to inscribe their sayings on. It's hard. But her body! Whew! There's one word no decent man wants to apply to a decent girl, and I hate to say it, but truth insists. Harriet is *rotund*!"

"Bill, you're dreadful!" Jess was also talking half banter. "I won't have you running down your sister like that. She's *not* rotund. She's not even fat."

"You haven't seen her this year. Seriously, though, Jess, I'm worried. So's mother. Perhaps all girls can't be beautiful, but they can be symmetrical. I leave you with that profound thought. I wish you could join the chase."

"I asked Mr. Poulson, but he said, 'No.' I do wish there were something I could do about Eddie."

"Go call on his mother. She's nearly wild, I hear. She needs some calm, intelligent, unhysterical person like you, Jess. We'll *find* the boy; you make her see it."

"Bill, you're wonderful," Jess said. "You rescue me from Miss Malvinia. You give me a party. You cheer me up . . ."

"Come, Mac. This is a good line to exit on. Thanks for cheering me up, Jess . . . I'll be seeing you."

Before she went to bed, Jess made the lengthiest entry of

THE INTERVIEW

all in her diary. *His* conversation covered pages. Her happiness colored everything. It seemed wrong to be so happy with Eddie still lost. She said a special prayer for his safety as she undressed. Thanks to Bill, and her prayer, she lay back on her pillow confident and undisturbed except for one vague filament of thought. One slim feeler of her mind kept reaching out for something she had thought, or intended to think, on her walk back with Bill. It had come and gone like the flash of a shooting star. She had leaped at its importance and then lost it in Bill's talk. This inspiration would not return now for all her seeking. Slumber welled up from the quiet outdoors and drowned out her fading effort.

WALLOP, WALLOP, WALLOP, BLISS

5



WHEN Jess woke she smiled for no reason, and then remembered. Bill!

Sunlight glinted from a poplar's leaves to dapple her ceiling. It was like looking at the ghosts of waves. The birds were making a bedlam of the lawn. She could hear a wren going down in the vines on the porch, and a flicker was hoicking across a field, and robins, blackbirds, and a catbird made a mixed chorus. There was one song that their coarser voices nearly obliterated — it sounded like a wood thrush. Suddenly a squawking blue jay drowned it out and Jess returned to her reverie.

Bill was wonderful, and to think she had been nearly furious at him for not believing her fish story! As if it mattered! Why did she always magnify, as Bill said, beetles into hippopotamuses? It was, as Bill said again, so silly to want to change people into somebody you wanted them to be. It couldn't be done. She would never again get angry at him,

WALLOP, WALLOP, WALLOP, BLISS

no matter how he teased her. She'd never get angry at anybody.

Suddenly a thought made her sit up. The paper! It would be downstairs and she'd be in it!

As Jess rushed into her clothes — and a girl can dress like a fireman when she wants to — her imagination pictured what was taking place all over the village. Her neighbors would be holding out folded copies of the paper to their friends and saying: "Look at that! Our Jess in the *Times*!" or, "Well, well, who'd've thought they'd send a reporter to interview her! We've got a celebrity and didn't know it," or, "That's some fish she caught. A record for Alder Brook or any other brook in this state. The Chamber of Commerce ought to take it up. Eight pounds! *Gollee*!"

Best of all Bill would be reading and saying: "Jess's sensible. Of course the boy can't stay lost forever. She's sized up the situation. Good for Jess!"

She tore down the stairs. Her father was already sitting on the porch reading the paper. "Oh, Dad, is it in? Is my interview on the front page?"

"'Morning, Jess! You look like a morning-glory turned into a comet. Give your withered old father a kiss."

"Dad, don't tease. *Is it?*"

"Sure thing. On the front page. Our Eddie's on the way to being a celebrity. Take it — I'm through."

JESS

Jess grabbed the sheet and looked where her father had pointed. There it was, fairly jumping out at her eyes:

BOY SCOUT LOST IN MAINE WOODS

MAINE POINT BOY VANISHED THREE DAYS AGO

Fourteen-year-old Eddie Briggs, last seen on Alder Brook four miles from his home near Maine Point last Saturday, has not been found in spite of the unceasing efforts of local search parties augmented by volunteers from Scout troops of Lewiston and Portland. . . .

Jess's eyes fairly gulped their way down the brief account. She felt a growing sickening of the stomach as she neared the end. She wasn't mentioned. Her name wasn't even *mentioned!* Not once! She had answered everything that reporter had asked her, she'd been as nice to him as possible, and he'd *left her out!* And her fish! *Not one word!*

Men! She hated them. How *could* he be so mean? To sit there and pretend like that! Why, he'd practically promised that she'd be in. And he couldn't even say, "According to Miss Jessie Randall . . ." or "Miss Jessie Randall, when interviewed, asserted that . . ." She'd helped him to do his job, saved him steps, helped him to earn his salary, and he couldn't even . . .

"Good morning, Jessie." Mrs. Randall came to the

WALLOP, WALLOP, WALLOP, BLISS

screen door. "You overslept, I guess. I'm afraid you're sitting up too late, Jessie."

"Don't nag the girl. These are stirring times," Mr. Randall said. He had been told of the interview and could read faces. But he was too tactful to offer sympathy unless sympathy was the right thing.

"I'm not nagging, Elbert. I simply don't want her to be worn-out. Come in to breakfast, please."

Jess did not move. She was a pillar of fire inside. An inferno of rage. It was a rage, though, that could easily dissolve into tears, for injustice is very cruel, bad enough in itself, but vicious indeed when it leads to self-pity.

"Please come, Jessie," Mrs. Randall called. "The paper will wait. You have to leave for school in a few minutes."

Jess followed her father indoors. A huge bowl of glowing strawberries made the center of the table gay. But not for Jess. She helped herself to a few of the berries in a languid manner, and ate one for form's sake.

"What's the matter, dear?" her mother asked.

"I'm simply not hungry."

"But you can't go to school on an empty stomach, Jessie."

"It's only armies that travel on their stomachs, dear," Mr. Randall reminded his wife. "Jess will likely walk, as usual."

"I'm not going to school. I'm not going to do anything,"

JESS

Jess announced, and the tears, if not in her eyes, were in her voice.

"Dear, you mustn't worry so. Eddie will be found," Mrs. Randall said with an assurance she did not feel.

"Eddie will be found when Poulson comes to his senses," Mr. Randall remarked. "They still haven't brought in the dogs. A good bloodhound . . ."

"That's it!" Jess cried. "That's what I couldn't remember!" Her last evening's inspiration! It swept into the background her disappointment and grueling humiliation and wrath. "Dad, I'm going to find him. I'm going to find Eddie. Do you remember that dog I wanted to buy? Over at Martins'? I'm going to get him and take him out to Mrs. Briggs's and get something of Eddie's to smell, and then I'll take him to Alder Brook and he'll trail Eddie. It hasn't rained and he can do it. Mr. Martin said he was a likely hound. I thought of it last night when Bill was talking about his setter having a blind nose. Naturally a setter wouldn't do, but a hound will. And I can use my chicken money. Can't I, Dad? Please say I can."

"May," said Mr. Randall, smiling at the lightning change in Jess. He had noted Jess's wild eagerness to see the paper out of the corner of his eye, noted her collapse of good spirits; now he was proud to see her rise from heartbreak to helpfulness. There's good stuff in her, he thought.

WALLOP, WALLOP, WALLOP, BLISS

"Will you take me over there at once? To Martins'?"

"You're going nowhere until you've eaten something,"

Mrs. Randall announced.

Families, as Jess says somewhere in her diary, are like glaciers. You can't hurry them. They are cold to suggestions and blue on the edges. But they do move and are even impressive at times. Mr. Randall seconded Jess's plan, and he gave her money to supplement her savings. Owing to an appointment, he could not take her to Martins', but he gave her a reprieve from school, and Jess was soon crossing fields and wood lots, full of her idea and, thanks to her mother's insistence, a comfortable breakfast.

Jess had never, even for the diary's completeness, listed her elements of greatness. Avid for publicity and total approval, she had not sat down to analyze her capacities. A dream, floating beautifully through the mind, is too entrancing to scrutinize too closely. A cloud, too near, is only fog. Certainly she would not have put her finger on one of her most important qualities, persistence, because this persistence seemed as natural to her as drawing the next breath. Didn't everybody have it? she would have asked, surprised. Well, everybody might have started off with it, but Maine Point, as she had suspected, was a place of arrested dreams largely from lack of this persistence.

Jess's next best quality lay in not lingering over past de-

JESS

feats. During the last few days she had been thrown for a loss several times. She had experienced the tragedy of the fish and the chance to outvie Bill, the tragedy of being left out of the newspaper, the ever-growing tragedy of Eddie's disappearance with the worry clinging to her thought like a bur, and the irritating irony of the publicity which Eddie was receiving, thanks to his dumbness, and which her nature yearned for as a plant the sun. Yet, frustrated time and time again, her mind refused to frequent these disappointments and dwell in self-pity. There is a kind of courage in this which outdoes many another kind in virtue, good sense, and usefulness.

Jess's growing buoyancy, however, was due partly to a motive which Mr. Meekom had never made the topic of a sermon. As she came in sight of the Martin farm, Jess was already seeing herself as the rescuer of Eddie against a huge field of competitors. This time she *would* be in the papers. If she couldn't bring Bill to admiration by a fish, she would by a dog. She would train her hound to feats which Mackerel Sky couldn't touch. She began thinking of a suitable name for him.

She had time to think because, after knocking at the back door, the woman who answered told her that Martin was not at home. This was galling because Jess detested waiting,

WALLOP, WALLOP, WALLOP, BLISS

and especially in a crisis like this when Eddie might be found at any moment. Her irritation was increased by Mrs. Martin, who apparently did not know whether to ask Jess in or not and seemed to be in a cloud. Even her clothes were undecided. Though it was bone-dry everywhere, she had on rubbers. Jess liked definiteness.

"When will Mr. Martin be back?" she asked.

"He didn't say."

"Well, when would he likely be back?"

"Before dinner, I reckon. Mostly he tells me if he's not coming to dinner. But I couldn't say for sure."

"I came to look at that hound again, Mrs. Martin. You still have it?"

"Oh, I think so. I reckon he's around."

"And he's for sale, I believe," Jess said.

"Now that I couldn't say for certain. Mr. Martin's the one to ask."

"But I want to take him now," Jess cried. "I want to trail Eddie Briggs who's lost."

"Yes, I think I did hear about Eddie."

"So, if he's for sale, perhaps I could pay you for him and take him right away. I could fix it up with Mr. Martin later."

"Now I wouldn't know what to do about that," Mrs.

JESS

Martin said. "I don't know what Mr. Martin's asking for him."

"I say we could arrange about the price later. The important thing is to start now. May I see the hound?"

"I suppose so," Mrs. Martin conceded. "If he's around, he'll be down to the barn, I reckon, unless he went with Mr. Martin."

Jess obtained permission to look for the dog and found him. She had fallen in love with his sad brown eyes on her former visit, and now, as she fondled his silky ears, she knew she must have him. She led him up to the house. She wanted to know his name so that she could begin winning him over to her. It didn't sound friendly just to say, "Here, dog," or, "Come along, hound."

Mrs. Martin was in the kitchen trying to decide whether to do her dishes or start a baking, as she explained.

"I found him," Jess told her. "Has he a name, Mrs. Martin?"

"Now I wouldn't know," the woman said.

Jess looked at the thin slatternly woman and bit her tongue. "Surely you must have heard Mr. Martin call him something."

"Now I come to think of it, I reckon he does," Mrs. Martin said. "But I wouldn't want to say, not knowing for certain."

WALLOP, WALLOP, WALLOP, BLISS

"I've brought twenty-five dollars," Jess said. "That was the price I heard Mr. Martin mention when I was over. May I leave it with you and take the dog?"

"Maybe he'd want more now," Mrs. Martin objected.

Jess was growing infuriated by the woman's manner. "But surely, Mrs. Martin, we could fix that up later. I don't believe he asks more, but certainly twenty-five dollars is enough money down."

"I reckon you'd better wait and see him, though I'm sure I can't say when that'll be." Mrs. Martin opened the stove door and saw that the fire had gone out. This was so much more important than serving Jess that the girl could get nothing more out of her, and sat down to wait. The hound lay at her feet as if he knew his owner and accepted the purchase price. Jess tried over various names in her mind. Jason might do, she decided. Jason had set out to find the Golden Fleece, just as this hound was going to find Eddie; Jason might be a good name, and it had a nice subdued sound that seemed to fit him. Of course there was Galahad. He was a hunter, too, and had tracked down the Holy Grail. But Galahad was rather long and you couldn't call a "he-hound" Gal. After all Mackerel Sky was a gorgeous name. New. It meant something, and you called him Mac for short. Jess sighed. It was frightfully hard to get ahead of Bill.

JESS

As long as Jess had decided to wait, she offered to help Mrs. Martin with things but Mrs. Martin wasn't sure that she needed her, and so Jess set about getting Jason to obey her. He seemed intelligent, as well as lovable, and his training progressed during the three mortal hours she had to defer her search for Eddie.

Winton Martin was very different from his wife. Ten minutes after he had driven up he had parted with the dog for the twenty-five dollars, told Jess that his name was Rover, agreed that Jason was better, agreed also that it was entirely possible for the hound to pick up Eddie's trail. "It hasn't rained nor blowed, you see. Of course all them searchers flumdoodlin' around ain't helped any. But a hound's a hound. Only last night I was sayin' to my wife it was mighty queer they hadn't sicked the dogs onto the boy, wasn't I, Maria?"

"I don't know, was you?" Mrs. Martin replied.

Jess, thanking her stars that she wasn't like that, called Jason to follow and rejoiced when he obeyed. At last, at last here was somebody to respect her, to do as she wished, to look up to her and listen when she talked, somebody to queen it over when she felt in a queening mood. "Jason, you sweet animal," she told him blithely, "I think I'm going to love you."

The Briggs farmhouse was already looming across a turnip

WALLOP, WALLOP, WALLOP, BLISS

patch when Jess came down to earth and realized that she was about to enter a home of sorrow. She hesitated, then went on, for it must be done. There could be no trailing of Eddie without his scent from some article he had worn.

The back of the house, which is the more alive part of most Maine dwellings, looked deserted. It was still too early in the season for tourists, of course. Mrs. Briggs was probably indoors sick from worry. Jess wished she had been more promptly neighborly.

She climbed over the wire fence. As she neared the house she heard a radio going full blast, a swing band. A shrill little voice was singing above the racket. Somebody else was ringing a bell in unison. It sounded very unlike a house of mourning, but Jess realized that Eddie's younger brothers and sisters could not be expected to understand.

Suddenly Jason increased his pace. His tail came up. He began to gallop and disappeared around the corner of the house. "Here, Jason . . . Jason!" Jess started to run after him. She was a little irritated that he had not learned obedience more thoroughly. She turned the corner and plunged into a large gathering of people.

The barricade of broad flannel-shirted backs stopped the girl as abruptly as so many bayonets. Through cracks in this human wall she recognized Mrs. Briggs on the porch step. A man shifted his position and she saw the rest: Eddie Briggs,

JESS

looking very red and perky, and beside him Bill Wolverton, with Mackerel Sky standing proudly by. On the faces of all four, if you counted the dog, Jess saw that slightly frozen expression of extreme satisfaction, the fixed lines of a smile that has been told to "hold it." And then she took in the reason. A few paces in front of them a young man was cranking a moving-picture camera! And he was *her* reporter!

"That will do for that," he said briskly. "Now one of Eddie by himself again. Eddie, look at me and not at the camera. When I drop my hand, I want you to start telling me just how you happened to get lost and how you felt. Be your good Boy Scout self. All right, Mrs. Briggs, if you'll just step aside."

Jess was stifled with racing emotions. Her first had been one of relief, of gratitude that Eddie was safe. "Oh, I'm so glad!" she said aloud, though unheard. But when she had jumped to the natural conclusion that Bill and Mac would not be featured in the picture unless they'd found Eddie, a protesting voice inside her kept repeating, "Oh, if only I . . . if only I . . ." And then her disappointment strengthened into bitterness as it dawned on her that dumb Eddie was being manufactured into a *hero*. It was bad enough to have him celebrated at home and featured in the *Times*, but a movie!

And, immediately, worse was to come. The reporter had

WALLOP, WALLOP, WALLOP, BLISS

adjusted a box which Jess knew from the movies as a sound-recording instrument. Was Eddie going to be in the newsreels, *too*? Was his silly face to be shown in all the theaters of America? She gazed, stupefied by his good fortune and her loss.

"Now, Eddie," the reporter prompted. "Just be natural . . . Do your stuff." Then his hand dropped.

Eddie's lower jaw dropped with it. For a second he stood there in his torn shirt, stained shorts, with his scratched face looking very vacant and his mouth open. Then he recovered and said, "It was last Saturday I got lost . . . I was in the woods after a Scout meetin'. It was gettin' late, so I was short-cuttin' it down Alder Brook [Here Jess's hope flared up. He *had* to mention her now, and then she'd be in the newsreels too] and wasn't thinkin' much about anything exceptin' how lucky . . . I mean how fine it was to be a Scout and prepared for anything, even if you haven't got a compass or matches or anything, and I run into a girl there by the brook. I must've scared her, I reckon, because she was hoppin' mad and came for me, and nacherly I didn't want to stop her from doin' whatever she was doin' and so I took another way home, and I must've spilled over onto the wrong side of the brook, though I don't remember that part, seein' as I was in a hurry to git home before Mom worried any. [Jess was flaming with indignation. He had passed her

JESS

without mention! He couldn't even be decent enough to mention the fish!] Anyways, it got darker 'n' darker and I started runnin' because a Scout should always be prompt. I knocked into trees and hurt my leg and every place was all alike. When my leg hurt too much I sat down and went to sleep. When I woke it was Sunday. I tried to remember what the Scout book said to do when you were lost. I could only remember two things. One was to follow water till you came out somewhere. The other was to sit right where you are until they found you. My leg hurt a lot and there wasn't any water I could see to follow, except a pool, so I decided to do what the Scout book said and sit right there.

"It was awful slow, waitin'. I killed a lot of mosquitoes. I ate some berries, too. I knew Mom'd send Mr. Poulson to find me, or somebody. I tried to make a fire without matches but I hadn't been a Scout long enough, or something. I didn't see no bears. Monday was even longer'n Sunday. I was terrible empty at first. I ate all the berries. I got excited come sundown 'cause I heard shots and a man shouting. I shouted back. But he always shouted just when I shouted. I ran to him on my sore leg but he wasn't there. That made me so lonesome I cried.

"I must've cried myself to sleep, for it was this morning, and I wished I could see even a bear for company. I tried to say over my Scout oath but I couldn't keep my mind to the

WALLOP, WALLOP, WALLOP, BLISS

words. I kep' thinkin' of Mom and Bud and Maisie and Ginny and bread and molasses sirup. And all at once I looked up and seen Mackerel Sky, Mr. Wolverton's dog. He stood pointing at me with his nose like a statue, except his tail was waving the least bit, and I shouted and Mr. Wolverton come and said, 'Master Edward Briggs, I presoom,' on account of he goes to Princeton and just nacherly talks like that. He give me some milk and a cracker and a piece of chocolate and took me to his car and I'm awful glad to be back with Mom and . . ."

"Now, one last close-up," Jess heard the reporter say. "Mrs. Briggs, kindly stand on the top step. Eddie, you run up and kiss her the way you did when you arrived."

Eddie's face flushed even redder. "Do I have to . . . ?"

"Certainly. You're a public character now . . . Get that other dog out of there, please."

Jason had run over to Mackerel Sky and Bill. "Hello, hound," Bill said, trying to push him away gently. "What are you, buddy? A publicity hound?"

Jason declined to leave. So Jess, with mounting color, pushed her way through the barricade of spectators and went over calling: "Here, Jason . . . Come *here!*"

Jason still refused. "Why, hello, Jess," Bill greeted her. "Is he yours?"

"Yes, I bought him to hunt Eddie with. Congratula-

JESS

tions, Bill, on finding him." The words hurt like trying to swallow dry toast. But she had to say them, for beneath her bruised pride lay her real self which had always made her act decently.

"Will someone kindly remove that hound?" The reporter's tone was cutting. "Time's passing, and you go on the air in fifty minutes, Eddie."

Flushing, Jess stooped and gathered up the lumpy Jason in her arms. She did not glance at the reporter. He showed no sign of recognizing her. The spectators opened a way for the laden girl. Staggering with her burden, she deposited Jason well beyond the magnetic circle and started toward home. The very air of that gathering was poison to her. So Eddie was to go on the air! This was the final straw. Eddie, the Scout shrimp, the dumb braggart, the smug tease, the meanie who could not even mention her fish, was to have tossed to him everything she so terrifically desired, yearned for, worked for. It wasn't fair! It was . . .

Tears, hot and salt, rolled down each cheek. She crossed a field and entered a wood lot. "Come here," she commanded Jason. "We can't go home this way." She sat down, leaning against a birch trunk. The hound stood looking at her. "Come, you've got to comfort me. You're all I've got out of this," she told him. "Come."

Jason, however, knew lunch time when he felt it. In the

WALLOP, WALLOP, WALLOP, BLISS

back of his head he had a faint picture which fitted into the emptiness in the pit of his stomach. He turned, reluctantly, it is true, but definitely from the strange girl in order to find the familiar tinful of food back home.

"Jason! . . . *Rover!*"

His tail disappeared between two bushes. He was gone.

Jess stared into the branch-laced green. This desertion hurt like a blow. Suddenly she felt drained of all spirit and strength. The suspense, the planning, the hope were over. She was just Jess Randall, a nobody, of a place so small it was practically nowhere, with nothing ahead. A miserable boy had all the honors. Bill, who had everything anyway, had the distinction of rescuing him. And now the dog, for whom she had given two years of savings, had deserted her, knowing she was no good, not worth a tail wag. He had crawled away, like a rat leaving a sinking ship, as Mr. Briggs had told her rats really did.

When a person who has had the courage to try to be more of a person touches bottom, that person rebounds. This was Jess's lowest moment. Suddenly all that she had been gathered together under her, like a tiger's legs, and sprang. "I won't be a sinking ship!" she said aloud to her leafy room. "*I won't! I will not!*"

The very force of her disdain for surrender did something for her. You can't pity yourself when you feel like fighting.

JESS

Jess rose. "I won't mope here," she said to herself. "I won't even talk about this. But I won't give up."

She left her nook and went out into the sunlight again feeling a new, more resolute calm.

Nobody was at home, for which she was thankful. She made herself some hot tea, then devoured some cold chicken, with bread and butter, and found some strawberry tarts her mother had made. Her spirits began to climb to their usual level. It was partly fatigue and lack of food that had made her feel so poorly. The tea kindled her vitality. After she had put everything away, she went upstairs to her diary. She determined to consider everything.

"May 13

"I think I grew up today. I have been acting like a little girl — flighty, butterflyish. I should plan. I trusted that reporter, instead of pinning him down to giving me a return. Even Jason left me because I trusted him too soon. I'm like Mrs. Edgewick when she shops. 'I think I'll take this. No I won't, either. I'll take that. Which do you think would be most becoming?' Great people make plans and stick to them until they work or until they change into something better. I might as well try to make a contract with Alder Brook as with my fluttery self. I was awfully near discouragement two hours ago but if a person is discouraged with herself what is there left? Nothing. And it is stupid to be

WALLOP, WALLOP, WALLOP, BLISS

left with nothing when the whole wide world is still there for the taking.

"So I am turning over a new leaf. Two hours ago I might have written something like this: 'Eddie is found, and I have missed out on everything again. Eddie is in the papers, in the newsreel, on the radio. Boohoo! boohoo!'

"But that was the old me, now discarded forever. Now I write this: 'Eddie got some publicity because he was lost three days. To beat him all I have to do is be lost *six* days. I would then have *twice* as much publicity.'

"It is as simple as that . . ."

Jess's pencil paused as an electric spark in her brain flash-lighted her mind with an inspiration. What an idea! Why not? Why shouldn't she . . .

A "Hello, Jess . . . where are you?" rang out from downstairs and Jess's pulse fluttered. It was Bill Wolverton's voice. Had heaven been at hand all the while?

"Here!" she called with a surge of joy. "I'll be right down."

This time she didn't wait to change her clothes. A dab at her hair, a quick look in the mirror, and down the steps the way a deer bounds over a bush, all lightness, all grace.

"I was looking for you after the obsequies," Bill said. "Why did you skin out in such a rush?"

"It didn't seem to be my party," she said, looking levelly

JESS

at him, noticing that he was better-looking than ever after the sun and air and exercise of these days.

"They wanted me to go on the air with Eddie, and I thought you'd do the honors for Maine Point better, but you'd gone."

"Oh, Bill!" Jess bit her lips at this new aggravation. "Did you actually go on?"

"No. Why should I? There was nothing to finding the boy. Mackerel Sky stumbled on him, you might say. I simply followed Mac. I told that reporter to put Mac on and let him explain."

Bill's disdain for being heard all over New England was almost incomprehensible to Jess. It frightened her a little. Suppose he knew how much she had cared? What would he think? She felt vaguely hurt, as if the distance between this tall, strong, rich, able young man and herself was greater than ever. How self-rounded one must be to be willing to toss a radio appearance to a dog!

"Did he?" Jess asked. "Did he let Mac on?"

"That reporter?" Bill asked. "He hasn't the imagination of a lobster pot. It burned me up, Jess, when I saw he'd left you out of the paper this morning."

A dawn of happiness broke in Jess's face at this sympathy.

"I told him so, too," Bill went on. "I said, 'When you

WALLOP, WALLOP, WALLOP, BLISS

get something, are you too tight to give something in return? You got half a column of dope from a friend of mine — you know who I mean, Jessie Randall — and you couldn't even mention her. She told you about the biggest fish that's been caught around here, or anywhere else in Maine for that matter, on so light a line and rod, and you didn't know enough to mention that. You're a hot reporter! ' "

" Oh, Bill! " It was all Jess could say, but this was happiness itself, having him champion her.

" He crawled, of course. He said he'd been sent to get Eddie's story, not fishing statistics." Bill laughed. " So I said, ' You never heard of human interest, I suppose.' He crawled some more, saying the editor would blue-pencil extra matter. ' Sure,' I said, ' the editor'd blue-pencil the Garden of Eden out of Genesis, if you wrote it. And I suppose it'd ruin your idea of newsreel footage to have a beautiful girl in it. When you saw her with her dog just now why didn't you brighten up things with her? ' "

" Oh, Bill, you didn't! " Jess cried delightedly.

" On the level. And he mumbled something about time being short or something. Excuses always come easy to people who have to make them. Jess, what're you doing? I thought up a dandy scheme and want to tell you about it, and then I thought up an even dandier one. What do you say

JESS

to us taking your rod — mine's up at the house — and fishing the Black Pool together? We could take alternate five minutes. Maybe we could raise that salmon of yours."

Bliss was piling on bliss. Bill's tone showed plainly that he had believed her all along. "Bill, how wonderful! And you did think I was telling the truth!"

"Of course, Jess." Then he grinned. "Didn't I make that plain?"

"Bill, you're the most dreadful tease. What's this dandy scheme you've thought up?"

"Three guesses."

"All right." Jess loved guessing. "But give me a hint, Bill."

"Gladly. It's about you, and a way to make money, and acquire fame, and help the Wolverton family — all at once. It's positively the most gorgeously immaculate and outrageously possible idea I've had since breakfast."

"On account of your being a sophomore you couldn't give me a hint in plain English, Bill?"

"Three guesses," Bill said firmly.

THE RISK

Revised from
READER'S SERVICE
Fresh. Board of Foreign Missions

6



To SAVE time Jess got her rod and they started for Black Pool before she started guessing. She had little to go on despite Bill's seeming generosity with hints.

"If I'm to make money, it must be work of some sort," she said. "Is that right, Bill?"

"It is and it isn't."

"No fair, riddles within riddles."

"Well, it would be the most diabolical, grinding, hair-pulling-out-by-the-roots kind of work for me, but not necessarily for you, Jess."

"And you say it will bring me fame?"

"It might and it mightn't."

"*Bill!* I said no fair." But when have I ever been as happy as this? Jess thought.

"I meant not world-wide fame, exactly," Bill explained.

"But if you succeed, your success would pass from mouth to

JESS

mouth. You'd have laid a foundation for other work of the same sort. Nothing could be difficult after that," he ended laughing.

"Bill, you're driving me crazy," Jess said. "What *can* it be? And how could I possibly help your family?" Then she recalled their talk of the night before. "Would it be about Harriet?"

"Bull's-eye!" Bill cried.

"But I don't see . . ."

"It's this, Jess. The idea penetrated my armor-plated skull this morning when I was trailing Eddie. I thought, 'Now if the little nitwit had stayed with Jess last Saturday and taken his punishment for upsetting her, he wouldn't be lost; he wouldn't be starving.' And then Harriet popped into my mind. Why? Because Harriet follows the thought of food just as ham follows an egg. I thought how ravenous she'd be and how good for her. And then . . . well, you know how one idea tags along after another . . . then I thought, 'Now if she'd only trail around with Jess, it'd be an education for her.' And *then* came my supreme, my colossal inspiration. 'Get mother to have Jess tutor her.' Isn't that a knock out? You'd come to the house next month, as soon as we move up for keeps, and spend the mornings with Harriet. You'd tutor her in the things she's dumb in for an hour or so, and after that gruesome business, you'd try to forget it in

THE RISK

swimming, or tennis, or maybe out in the woods like this. Harriet hates the woods because the stupid bushes don't grow chocolate bars. You'd let your dynamic disposition shine upon her until you'd kindled the gal. It'd be worth money to see that happen. And you'd be doing a blessed favor to the clan Wolverton, for which, tight as we are, we ought to exchange a couple of dollars . . . Of course it might kill you."

While Bill was taking the tight roof from Jess's existence with this plan, the girl felt as if she were going up in an airplane for the first time. The view got wider and wider. But when he said, so matter-of-factly, "Of course it might kill you," she laughed aloud. "You're so funny about your sister, Bill. Are all brothers like you?"

"They haven't got sisters like Harriet," Bill said. "That's like asking do all animals live in pens, just because pigs do. Would you try it, Jess? Say, 'Yes.' I've got to go down on the sleeper tonight for the final marathon, and may the man who invented exams die of bookworms. But I'll stop over in New York and see the family. Say, 'Yes,' and I'll talk it up like a brush salesman."

"It'd be wonderful, Bill, if you think I could do it."

"You can be yourself, can't you?"

"Which self?" Jess answered soberly. "I'm finding out about selves. I seem to be a package of them. I'm one person in school and one in church and half a dozen at home."

JESS

Bill looked at her and smiled. "Let's settle on the one you are now, Jess. Hold it, and charm the world. Did you know that you are a very, very attractive girl?"

"Thank you, Bill," Jess said simply, because she knew nothing else to say. "Princeton must be a wonderful college."

He glanced quickly at her. "Why change the subject? It was a nice subject."

"I'm not changing it."

Then he understood. "Princeton does more than teach us to talk well. You'll see."

That night Jess wrote in her diary, dipping her pen in joy:

"Bill is like a sea breeze. Maybe that is what a real friend should be like, a cool salt air coming in from spaces one has never seen. I've never had such an afternoon. At 3 o'clock I was so small and foolish after all my disappointments over Eddie that I was all cramped up in myself, in one closet of myself. At 7 o'clock, after four hours of *him*, the woods, and the wonderful fun of sharing a fishing rod with him, even though we didn't get my fish, I was let out of myself. I intend never to go back and shut myself up in the closet.

"Oh, I *hope* he persuades his mother to let me tutor Harriet! Even if what he said about her is true. I'll never forget how handsome he looked, sitting on a rock by the pool, his

THE RISK

hair nicely mussed, his shirt open at the throat, his eyes showing he liked me. He said, 'You know, Jess, Harriet's a washout, not because she's really stupid, but because she's never stirred up. People don't lack strength; they lack fire and will. You take anybody, I don't care how dumb, dull, dense, and don't-careish he is, and show him something to get steamed up over and he's got all the energy in the world. That's what I like about you. You never lie down on anything. If you despair and things don't pan out, as in this Eddie business, you work on in despair, and then something turns up. It always does for people like you. How did you get that way?'

"I almost felt like telling him my wild idea, the one about getting myself lost for *six* days to Eddie's three, only I saw how silly it was and I hated to imagine what he'd think of me. But it really was a wonderful idea, and I'd *love* to know what would happen. I'd be very sly and chipmunky about it. I'd begin by making up little parcels of food in oilskin paper so it wouldn't spoil. Then I'd tell Dad I was going back to Alder Brook to catch my fish again. Each time I went I'd hide a day's food somewhere, just like a squirrel. My first place would be Nameless Pond. I *love* that name — Nameless. It sounds as though nobody had tagged it, a kind of unspoiled place where anything can happen, especially dreams.

JESS

"I know just the first place I'd hide the first night, under that mossy ledge at the north end. We pity the cave men, but I don't see why. They had everything I love most and didn't have to stop every minute to say: 'Can I afford this? No, I can't.' That's what makes up our lives now. Mother's forehead might just as well have it written in charcoal, it's that plain. And Dad spends his life between two boxes: this one where he eats and rests up to go back to the other one, his office, where he advises people how to live in their boxes, so that he'll have enough money to keep the roof over ours. If you look at it, we're sillier than *any* animal, and all the time God is waiting to be partners if we want and ask. That makes our silliness perfect. If Dad was in his office and God was waiting outside and Dad *knew* God loved him and could do anything for him and was dying to — well, of course, I don't mean dying — I mean if Dad had the most powerful, the wisest, the most affectionate friend sitting outside *waiting* to help and Dad wouldn't see him, because he was busy figuring out how to pay a bill, Dad would be the biggest fool on earth. And that's us, all of us. Except, I suppose, Mr. Meekom, though he doesn't look or sound terribly happy, as you'd be if you had God for a partner, *really*.

"But to get back to Nameless Pond. I wonder if I'd be scared. I don't think so. There is nothing to hurt me except myself, and I'd have the Senior Partner. I like think-

THE RISK

ing of God as Senior Partner and not a million miles away, either. Eddie was lonely, but I'd not be lonely, not with my mind along. I'd entertain a lot. I'd have Bill around all the time, and probably Gary Cooper and Laurence Olivier and loads of people. Dad and Mother would be a problem. Mother would be having eleven cat fits worrying about her darling daughter out there in the deep, dark, damp, and dangerous woods, without even a broom or a dishpan for company. All her imagination, which she keeps in the storeroom most of the time, would be working overtime, making pictures of my misery until it drove her to bed. Dad, being a lawyer, would naturally take the other side. Dad would say: 'Now, now, don't worry so, Mother. It's foolish to worry. Jess can take care of herself. She's been in the woods all her life. A little adventure is good for her. This time she seems to have bitten off more than she could chew. But she'll be all right. That gal's got a head on her. I won't worry if she isn't back a week from Thursday.' And of course he'd be worrying rings around Mother.

"I don't see how I could tip them off not to worry, though. And the relief when I was found would make up for it. You forget worries like what you had for dinner this time last month. And they'd be pretty busy, too, answering reporters. I'd have lots of time to think up what I was going to say on the radio and in the newsreels. Poor Eddie missed a chance there.

JESS

I might even get asked by *We, the People*. I almost wish *he* hadn't come and spoiled it all, for I was mad enough this afternoon really to do it. But I don't mean that. Having a real talk with *him*, with nobody to interrupt, was better than having my picture in the *Times*. And yet if I'm not a somebody, how can I keep up with somebody who is *going* to be a somebody? That's the awful question. For *he's* going to be one. Like attracts like. Famous people go with famous people. Rich marries rich. Dumb hangs around with dumb, saying, 'Oh, what's the use?' and getting nowhere, naturally. I knew I wanted to be a somebody. Now I know why. To be worth *his* hunting up and going with. And I'm *going* to be. It's a long, long wait until June 11."

Jess was spared the feeling of tedious waiting. The days, while constantly longer, were also constantly fuller, as she remarked in her diary.

The diary had become a friend. She had long ago forgotten her father's gibe, which was the occasion for her starting it, and was writing now with all the satisfaction that a beautiful girl finds in a mirror.

She had committed herself to frankness at the beginning; the taste for it grew. Sometimes it frightened her a little, when she looked back, to see how unsparing she was of herself, her motives and secret longings and petty failings. Without

THE RISK

knowing it she was painting a portrait of herself in all her moods, an undraped portrait, full-length and unprettified. Scarcely less frank was the picture of her parents. The inhabitants of Maine Point, their hopes and fears and funny sides, figured bulkily, and the aspects of nature which Jess tried to see more clearly in order to write them down furnished paragraphs and even pages of firsthand observation. The diary outgrew the first blankbook and overflowed into Volume II.

Jess was not concerned about having her intimacies read. Mrs. Randall left her daughter's room severely alone. She had given Jess complete responsibility for its order and cleanliness at first for education's sake. Mrs. Randall was determined that her offspring should be a good cook and a good housekeeper. Jess's other activities were so much embroidery. Not to go into Jess's room became a habit. Jess had a secret place for her diary. She had once begged her father to make a shelf for her shoes in her closet. Under it, at the dark end, she kept Volume I and hid Volume II after each writing. Even if, by the one chance in a thousand, her mother did come across these books, she would not read them, would not so much as glance into them. However, just to clinch this matter of safety, Jess pasted a childish picture on the cover of each and wrote SCRAPBOOK beneath as a final camouflage.

She was somewhat more worried lest her parents ask what she was doing in her room so long and so often.



JESS

"I think you're studying too much," Mrs. Randall did remark one evening at supper. "Your light was on until after eleven last night."

"I object, Your Honor," Mr. Randall said to his wife. "Jess is too old to be policed now. What's the intellectual interest, Jess?"

"I'm doing some nature work," Jess said, keeping well within the truth.

"Are your lessons so much harder this term, Jess?" her mother asked.

"No, Mother. Not harder, more interesting. Of course if I weren't interested, you'd sail into me for that. How anybody's to know the exact, precise line that suits, I don't see."

"I wasn't sailing into you, dear. I just don't want you to ruin your health with late hours."

"Does it look ruined, Mother?" Mr. Randall asked. "Did you know that the scientists have discovered and proved beyond any possibility of being wrong that mental work uses up no energy whatever?"

"I wonder you ever come home tired," Mrs. Randall said, a bit tartly for her.

"Do you think that's true, Dad?" Jess asked.

"What I think doesn't matter. They've conducted the most exacting tests over a long period of time in laboratories of many of the civilized countries, and the greatest scientists are in agreement. Mental work produces no trace of

THE RISK

fatigue. You can think all day and not use up the energy you require to get up out of your chair."

"That's perfect nonsense, Elbert, and you know it," Mrs. Randall exclaimed. "I've seen you work over a case until you were ready to drop with fatigue."

"But not from thinking," Mr. Randall said.

"What, then? You didn't stir from your chair."

"He was probably worrying, like you, Mother," Jess put in.

"Of course you'd take your father's side, Jessie. Just the same . . ."

"The girl's right," Mr. Randall said. "Worry is something else again. Conflict is exhausting. Emotion takes energy. But the fact remains that your mind functions without causing fatigue. Your body flame is burning, slowly but surely, and that consumes energy. A schoolboy gets tired after an hour of mental work because he hasn't learned to concentrate; his attention wanders; his interest evaporates. But the actual brainwork he's been doing accounts for none of his tiredness."

"It's a pity they didn't find it out sooner," said Mrs. Randall, still unconvinced.

"You could say that about making electricity, Mother," Jess said. "Or flying." She was delighted that this argument had come up and diverted their attention from her diary.

One thing that troubled Jess was absence of news from

JESS

Bill. He had told her that he would not bring up the tutoring proposition until the psychological moment. Jess could only wait and try to control herself. The rise and decline of Eddie's popularity filled her first week after Bill's departure. Thanks to her afternoon with Bill, she had been able to watch Eddie without being devoured by jealousy, and soon she was learning what to avoid if equal eminence came to her. She would avoid wearing a silly grin. She would avoid making her story bigger and bigger with each passing recital of it. Eddie strutted. Then he fancied that it was he that was interesting, rather than the special accident which had befallen him. Then, when his sickened hearers fled, he came to earth with a thud and was just Eddie Briggs who had been pretty dumb. It almost horrified Jess that the newspaper glory and the radio appearance were so soon forgotten by everyone.

One evening she was in the post office, a little heartsick at finding no letter, when she overheard Sheriff Poulson talking to Postmaster Struthers. "Not a penny, Josiah," Mr. Poulson was saying. "Not a red cent did she get out of it. Of course that young fellow runnin' things, he buttered her up sayin', 'Wonderful publicity, Mrs. Briggs. Worth a million dollars.' But he didn't offer to supply none of the million."

"I guess she was glad to get her boy back and didn't think of it," Mr. Struthers remarked.

"Yes, but she should've thought of it. I hear they pay

THE RISK

fellows as much as a thousand dollars just to say something into the radio."

"That would be in California, I reckon," Mr. Struthers said.

"California or no California, it's money. She should've stuck him a hundred dollars, anyway, to let Eddie go on. She wasn't smart."

"I guess none of the Briggses is what you call smart."

"Maybe you've said something," the sheriff concurred. "That kid's dumbness has wore me out. I don't want to hear his name again. Just the same I say she wasn't smart."

Jess didn't like to hang too near any longer and she started home, but thoughtfully.

Jason also helped to fill in the time. Jason wasn't smart either. What with her effort to train him into becoming a dutiful as well as an affectionate dog, and school, and the household chores, and her garden, Jess was gainfully occupied. June arrived and began at once to melt away. Then, on June 10, when Jess had ceased to expect news, an event unprecedented in her life knocked at her door in the shape of a telegram. For one delirious moment Jess thought, "*Prize!*" She had won the \$25,000, or at least the \$10,000, and they were considerably letting her know in the quickest way possible. Her hand trembling, she tore open the envelope and read:

JESS

Green light for Harriet see you tomorrow bells bells bells.
Bill.

After the merest flicker of heart-sinking disappointment, Jess laughed. The prize announcement could come later; it was scarcely time for it. Meanwhile, this! The wording was so like Bill that it was almost seeing him in person. And she *would* see him tomorrow. That was joy. For some reason she did not show the sacred paper to her parents, but said at supper, "I had good news today. The Wolvertons want me to tutor Harriet this summer."

Mrs. Randall stopped pouring tea and her father interrupted his reaching for the butter. "You're a quiet one, Jess!" he exclaimed. "How did this come about?"

"Bill mentioned it when he was up. I didn't say anything about it because . . . well, because. You know. If you talk too much . . ."

Mr. Randall smiled. "Teach Harriet that, Miss Socrates, and you'll earn your pay. How much is it? Or aren't you telling that, either?"

"I don't know. I'll have to see Mrs. Wolverton about that."

"Hit them for plenty."

"Now, Elbert," Mrs. Randall objected. "Bill has been very kind to Jessie . . ."

"Now I'm doing some tutoring," Mr. Randall said. "In

THE RISK

a subject that women never master. Money and emotion don't mix. If Jess is tutoring Harriet for love of Bill, that's one thing. If it's a job, that's another. How about it, daughter? "

Jess saw the twinkle in the back of her father's mind, if not in his eyes, and said: " It's a job. For value received I'm to give her a solid grounding in Latin, algebra, and history. How much should I ask, Dad? "

" How much time are you giving? "

Jess told him what Bill had said.

" I'd rate my services at twenty-five a week," Mr. Randall advised.

" Oh, Elbert! She's never tutored before. That comes to a hundred dollars a month, or more," Mrs. Randall exclaimed.

" Well, she's giving practically her whole day."

" Of course I couldn't earn twenty-five dollars the whole summer," Jess said. " I . . . "

" Lesson two in what every woman should know," Mr. Randall cut in. " You mentioned something about 'for value received.' That's the first fundamental in price-fixing. Be sure you have a value to give. Well, you have. You can probably get some Latin, algebra, and history into Harriet's fat head. But, you have also a character to impart, to share. If I were the Wolvertons, that's what I'd be paying you for. You can teach Miss Harriet the one lesson it is her

JESS

crying need to learn, because you've learned at least a bit of it yourself."

"What's that, Dad? 'Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness'?"

"No, it's just life — in eight words: 'We can't escape the consequences of our actions.' I can't escape the consequences of my actions. Thou canst not escape the consequences of thy actions. He can't escape the consequences of his actions. That's all. When Harriet knows that, she'll be educated. And so will you."

Jess loved her father when suddenly he went quiet and serious and warm-toned, for she knew he was giving her something from the depths of his experience. But now she chose to laugh. "I wish you could get schoolteachers to agree, Dad, that that was all we had to know."

"They agree all right," Mr. Randall said. "Only they put it very simply at first. They say, 'Learn the exports of Brazil and you'll get a good mark.' 'Don't fire spitballs and you'll avoid trouble.' You'll find them agreeing and you'll find teachers agreeing all the way up. Have you ever read a serious book in which the characters escaped the consequences of their actions? Yes? You say a criminal got away? Then I say the book ended too soon. So would Mr. Meekom."

"Jessie, will you pass this tea to your father, please."

THE RISK

Jess took the cup but continued looking at her father.

"Mr. Meekom takes the book on beyond the grave. Do you for a minute suppose that these men who are murdering millions in Europe will escape the consequences of their crimes? Suppose Hitler, say, continues to kill until one day he is cornered and commits suicide. Does he escape by that? If he thinks so, he has coming to him the surprise of his immortal life. The laws of God are life's detectives and they haul every man and woman born to God for judgment."

"Elbert, you're getting very serious," Mrs. Randall said. "Do eat your meal before it gets cold."

"Women are funny creatures," Mr. Randall observed, and he would not elaborate.

"I wish men were; it'd be easier to get along with them," Mrs. Randall added. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing. My meal is getting cold."

"Oh, Dad, don't leave me on pins and needles."

"I'm through. The sermon is ended. The cold salmon is very good."

"Dad!" Jess enjoyed her father's gibes at the feminine gender. If anyone deeply cared for two women, it was her father.

Mrs. Randall suddenly said, "Are you sure you can do it, Jessie?"

"What, Mother?"

JESS

"Tutor Harriet Wolverton."

"Of course, Mother. I never get less than 90 in history and 80 in Latin, and I'm fair in algebra."

"I don't think that's what your mother meant, Jess," Mr. Randall remarked. "But she oughtn't've said even that. I don't approve of making you doubt yourself before you begin."

"That is scarcely one of Jessie's failings," Mrs. Randall observed astutely.

Jess had that inexplicable thing called taste. If you had asked Postmaster Struthers, who saw her every day, what she wore, he would have looked surprised and said, "Why, I dunno as I ever noticed." Miss Tottem would have replied: "Jessie dresses very nicely. She has entirely too much sense to center her life on clothes." But Bill Wolverton, driving up to fetch her, was neither obtuse nor buried in educational matters. Or perhaps he was a little worried. His already smiling face took on a deeper satisfaction as Jess came out to the car. Jess had on a dull blue something — it was really a crepe that looked like wool — that made her as beautiful as a gentian. (Bill didn't know that Vogue's Pattern Service was allowed to go through the mails.) Being healthy and young, Jess would have been attractive in a potato sack. But Bill was hardly prepared for the excellent taste which would

THE RISK

enable her, as he saw, to feel at home even in his home.

"Hi! . . . Two hi's, Bubble."

"Oh, Bill, this is wonderful of you. But why Bubble?"

"Know anything prettier?" Bill asked. "Get in softly so you won't burst before Mother sees you in that outfit. It's dandy, Jess."

"You're the first person who ever noticed it," Jess said, pleased, relieved, happy.

"The country of the blind," Bill said, starting the car. "What've you been doing?"

Jess smiled across at him. "Waiting for this moment. How did you make out with the exams, Bill?"

"I did my best to flunk them. Then you could've tutored me too. But I'm afraid I'm much too brilliant to flunk more than one or two. Anyway I won't know for a happy while. How's our mutual mug, Eddie?"

"Forgotten, thank goodness," Jess wanted to say, but didn't. "Eddie's helping his mother, Bill. I guess it's no joke on that farm. I hope this is a good tourist year. Even then he has to work awfully hard for a boy of his age."

"And the fish?"

"In the water."

"That must be corrected," Bill said. "Water's no place for fish, especially adult fish who've put on weight."

Jess laughed, but under the laugh was a sense of beautiful

JESS

harmony, a swift, smooth-running harmony like the car, with a handsome carefree hatless young man at the wheel of her life. Bill turned into a curving driveway and stopped before the luxurious summer home which he referred to as the cottage, but which seemed to Jess like a dream palace.

She went in with Bill and found herself in a hallway as large as the whole ground floor of the Randall house. She had expected Mrs. Wolverton to be there to greet her. "Mother isn't down yet," Bill remarked casually. This struck Jess as strange, for it was after ten o'clock. "You might as well wait in here, while I round up Harriet," and he indicated the living room opening off the hallway to the south. As he went from the room he looked back and said, "Make yourself at home, and maybe you'd better forget everything I've told you about the gal."

Jess had seen pictures of the homes of wealth but had never been invited into one before. All at once she realized that Bill's world was as different from hers as if it had been located on Sirius. She saw, from the great windows, that nothing interfered with the view — a lawn, the reddish rocks of the headland jutting over the water, and, beyond, the islands like a widely spaced fleet anchored in the sky blue of the bay.

It was a room she could have lived in forever, she thought, and suddenly the pang of suspense over her \$25,000 prize be-

THE RISK

came heartsick fear. She would never win it. And this room must have cost a large part of that amount. A great fireplace of native stone with a magnificent fire screen filled her with a longing to sit there and sit and sit, before a slumbering fire, and dream. A thousand dollars an hour! That was what Mr. Poulson said a person got — if she were famous. A winter's work and she could have a place like this with rich old dim rugs whose colors softened into each other, with wide dark tables holding all the books and flowers she wanted, with a dining room, such as showed far off across the hall, where the celebrities would meet for gorgeous meals and laughter.

A dozen magazines, looking as if nobody bothered even to touch them, lay on a side table. Bowls of flowers, more flowers than she would have in her garden all summer, stood about as if placed by invisible hands. A soft morning breeze came in from the sea, and a wonderful quietness filled every corner. Just to keep such a room dusted, thought Jess, who connected everything with the work to produce it, would be a job.

Jess began to wonder if Harriet had run away. She remembered a sentence Miss Malvinia had made her write fifty times for being late. (Jess had been rescuing a kitten in a sleetstorm.) "Punctuality is the courtesy of kings." It was a pity there were so few kings left to practice that admirable motto. Jess wondered how many kings had ever



JESS

heard of it. Kings . . . princes . . . princesses . . . What would have happened to fairy stories without them? Royalty . . . That was what she felt inside, really. It did help though to have regal surroundings, like this room. You couldn't help being gracious . . .

A laugh and a squeal indicated the lost had been found. Bill held a curtain aside, made a comic bow and said, "Enter lamb . . . for slaughter." Harriet passed him, and Bill went on, "Only of course, Jess, if you say 'lamb' to Harriet, she thinks of mint sauce."

"You don't know what I think, and never did," Harriet said.

"Then I've made some darn good guesses," Bill countered. "Miss Randall, Miss Wolverton, and God help you!"

Harriet's hand shake was unenthusiastic. She was, as Jess saw, rotund — in Bill's phrase. Twenty pounds less and she would be more comely and more comfortable. She was only a year younger than Jess, but no one could imagine her doing the crawl, scaling a cliff, shinnying up a tree, or skiing. Her blond hair was taffy-colored and Jess at once detected a look in her blue-gray eyes which no one could call "dumb." Her chin had a stubborn look, and her voice was anything but courteous as she turned on Bill and said, "Now you've done your worst, go jump off the cliff."

"Thanks for coming for me," Jess said to Bill.

THE RISK

"See you at lunch," Bill said and left.

It was a difficult moment for the village girl. Hostility was the word which best summed up Harriet's attitude, and her first remark made it plain. "Mother says I don't have to keep on tutoring if I don't like it."

Jess had an inspiration. "Why do you have to tutor at all?" she asked sympathetically. She saw at once that this was a personality you couldn't drive.

Harriet seemed surprised. "Because Bill meddles in everything. He keeps saying I'm dumb."

"I don't believe it," Jess said with clear sincerity.

"I'm lazy," Harriet announced with surprising frankness. "Bill can't tell the difference."

"Well . . ." Jess felt as if this conversation was getting ahead of her. "Perhaps it adds up to the same thing."

"No, it doesn't," Harriet said abruptly. "If you're dumb you can't understand your work. If you're lazy you don't want to."

"But . . . if other people want you to . . ."

"That's their hard luck," Harriet remarked. "Have some candy?" She uncovered a bonbon jar and offered it to Jess.

"Thank you, no. Not now." Jess watched Harriet help herself to three fat chocolates and wondered whether or not she should object. She decided not to. First make Harriet

JESS

her friend, and the lesser things would follow. "Bill said that you had your books. Where do we go?"

"I don't care."

Those three words, as Jess learned before the hour and a half of studies was up, comprised Harriet's motto, her rule of living where others' desires were concerned. But she didn't even live up to them. She did care, violently, if opposed. Jess decided on indoor studying because concentration was easier, and there would be outdoors to look forward to. Harriet took her to a morning room with a few wind-bent pines sentinelng its small-paned windows, and produced her books, also some chewing gum. "I think you'd better park that," Jess said.

"Why?" Harriet's eyes revealed no particular animosity and no friendliness. She was trying out her tutor.

Jess had a second inspiration. Instead of falling back upon her authority, as Miss Malvinia would have done, or making some sharp personal remarks, as was Miss Tottem's way, Jess said: "We could get up a good debate on that. I can see the picture. Six girls on one side, busy chewing gum, six on the other side without it, and a moderator at a desk listening to the arguments. I'm sure the girls who were chewing gum as they talked would be handicapped and lose the debate. Which is your hardest lesson, Harriet?"

"The hardest?" Harriet did not open the chewing gum,

THE RISK

much to Jess's relief. "Whichever I'm doing is the hardest. I hate Latin most, because it's the silliest. Why learn a dead language until you're dead?"

Jess smiled. "I asked Dad that, because he's a lawyer and makes money out of Latin. He gave me a lot of reasons. He made a list of them, two lists. The first list was practical. You really *use* Latin all the time. The second list wasn't what it did *for* you, but what it did *to* you. He said that he doubted if you could really be an educated person without knowing the past, and you couldn't really know the past without knowing Latin, some Latin anyway, just as you couldn't be a good cook until you knew more than one way of cooking potatoes."

"I can cook potatoes lots of ways, but I'm not a good cook," Harriet said unexpectedly. Harriet managed to talk, not as most girls talk, with a rising and falling of the voice, but with an even inflection. Her voice was rich and rather low and pleasant to listen to, and now that she had admitted that she wasn't a good cook, Jess found herself already beginning to like her. She apparently concealed much behind her mask of laziness.

"But Dad's fair," Jess went on. "He says it's stupid to get snobbish about Latin. He says the point of schooling is education, not lessons. He says the point of being educated is to be free, in your mind. He says that the ignorant can

JESS

never be free. They are always held back by their lack of knowledge, and superstition, and prejudice, and imperfect mental tools. Only the educated are free. Occasionally, he says, you meet a natural, a person who got educated without going to school at all, or very little — like Abraham Lincoln, though of course Lincoln kept studying all the time. But Dad says it's a risky thing to count on, something like sailing a small boat across the ocean. You just might have good weather and do it, but most likely not. So that's why we go to school, to be educated the safer way."

"What if you don't want to be free — that way?"

Jess looked at the plain little wrist watch which her chickens had presented her with and saw that ten minutes of the thirty she had planned to devote to the first lesson had already gone.

"I'm glad you like to talk this way," she said to Harriet. "We're going to enjoy each other." Then she opened the Latin book.

Conversation, as Jess soon found, was not the only wile that her pupil had up her sleeve. All her other subterfuges were equally cream-smooth and inexhaustible in variety. Jess began to realize that she had a task ahead. Harriet was determined to exhaust rather than be exhausted. Without one word that could be called discourteous, or one act that was openly disobedient, Harriet managed to make Jess feel that

THE RISK

her attempt to tutor was going to be hopeless, and the sooner Jess found it out the better.

After the ninety minutes, there was still an hour before lunch. "Shall we go swimming?" Jess asked. "I brought my suit."

"It's too cold in the bay and they haven't let the water into our swimming pool yet."

"But it's not too cold for a dip," Jess said.

"I like the pool."

"But the waves!" Jess cried. "They're such fun."

"For you, yes," Harriet said evenly but with irritation too. "You're just like Bill. If *he* thinks a thing is fun, then of course it must be fun for me. I've always got to enjoy myself exactly as he wishes or he calls me stupid, childish, unreasonable, doltish, or a noddy. It makes me very tired."

Jess laughed. "You're right, Harriet. I plead guilty, as Dad says. I was thinking of myself. My trouble is that if I enjoy something, I simply can't help being enthusiastic about it and wanting other people to like it."

"I never try to make people like the things I like," Harriet said in that strangely even, impersonal voice. "And I hate enthusiasm. It's like puppies, always jumping around one's legs."

"I never thought of that," Jess said. "Still, I'd die if I couldn't feel joy rushing up in my mind."

JESS

"I enjoy things very, very much," Harriet said. "And very soon I'm going to enjoy lunch."

At that moment Mrs. Wolverton came in and both girls rose. Jess had seen Mrs. Wolverton a few times at a distance. She belonged to the great world of New York, to the society columns, the rotogravure sections of the Sunday papers. Jess saw instantly, as she faced this fairly tall, gracious-seeming woman, who was dressed to go out, and whose face behind the half veil was small but classically molded — Jess saw where Bill had got his fine looks.

"I'm so delighted you could come," Mrs. Wolverton was saying. "Harriet will benefit, I'm sure. Bill has spoken so highly of you. I'm sorry I must rush away. I'm lunching at the Haverills', darling," this was to Harriet, "in case you want me. Luncheon will be ready in a few moments, but if you'd like to show Miss Randall the dogs, you'll have time. Saunders can wait. You won't miss me, sweetheart, I know. I told Franchot to surprise you — your favorite dessert." Then to Jess, "If there's anything you want, Miss Randall, please ask for it." And she was gone.

Jess was left with the impression of a woman of immaculate exterior, yet remote, with the same defense that Harriet had, one whom she would never know. Jess had expected an inquiry about Harriet's work, perhaps a question or two about herself. Instead Mrs. Wolverton's chief concern had been

THE RISK

to see that her daughter was not disappointed about her dessert.

Luncheon was another new experience for Jess. The dining room was the most beautiful room she had ever dreamed of, spacious, with picture windows, paneled, with a dark table set for three. Bill had joined them and took the head of the table. Saunders turned out to be a butler, a staid, severe man who gave Jess the impression that it was beneath his dignity to come to Maine Point and that he simply would not imagine a native as guest. Jess was drawn in all directions. She wanted to take in the silver and the china, converse with Bill, be polite to Harriet, and still have some attention left for the food, which was the most delicious, delicate, glutton-making food imaginable.

"You can't guess what dessert's going to be," Harriet said to her brother.

Bill looked at Jess and wagged his head, touching one brow with his forefinger, as if to say: "Don't mind her, Jess. She's a little balmy, but it's not dangerous."

Jess didn't know at once what to do. It was wonderful having a sort of secret understanding with Bill, yet she mustn't alienate Harriet.

"I don't have to guess," Bill said. "It'll be sugar in some form and probably discolored with chocolate. You'll add another pound and have another pimple."

JESS

"Be as disgusting as you like, but at least stick to the truth," Harriet remarked in that even tone of hers which was provoking in its self-control. "I haven't had one for years and you know it." Then to Jess: "You see? He tries to take the fun out of everything."

"I think you have a way of seeing that he doesn't," Jess said.

Saunders entered with the reply to Harriet's riddle — *crêpes suzettes*. Bill took one look and laughed. "I might've known . . . Jess, Harriet's going to start a church. The congregation will do their responsive readings from a cookbook. When they pass the plate, it's so the members can inspect the salad dressing. The sermons will be on different recipes. And the church will split, sooner or later, on the profound question as to whether you stir the batter for these stomach plasters from left to right or the other way."

Jess laughed. "Bill, you're dreadful."

"You don't really mean that," Harriet said slowly to Jess. "But you will someday. See if you don't."

Bill pushed back his chair, saying, "We'd better go, before this gets personal."

Jess rose, disturbed, wondering how it could be that in this glorious home, with everything that anyone could possibly want for comfort and happiness, a brother and sister should darken each other's contentment with a silly feud. But an-

THE RISK

other feeling cast an even deeper shadow over her pleasure, some vague discomfort coming from the deadly seriousness of Harriet's remark. It was impossible that she could ever dislike Bill, *ever*. "But you will someday." It annoyed her that she should pay even the slightest attention to the words of an angry girl. Yet their tone was not angry, rather grimly prophetic. For a moment she wished she had not taken on this job.

That evening Mr. Randall asked Jess about her work.

"I'll tell you next week, Dad. Harriet's a Chinese puzzle. She's able. I believe she's even smart. She announces that she's lazy. But why? That's what it'll take me a little while to fathom — if I have that little while."

"What do you mean by that?" Mrs. Randall asked.

"The very first thing Harriet said was that Mrs. Wolverton told her that she wouldn't have to go on being tutored if she didn't like it. And I can see that she's determined not to like it."

"But surely, Jessie, her mother must decide."

"What's Mrs. Wolverton like, or didn't you meet her?" Mr. Randall inquired.

"Oh, she's quite grand and hidden, like Harriet. I saw her for a minute. She was very courteous."

"That's their profession," Mr. Randall remarked.



JESS

"I'm afraid Bill's not going to be much help," Jess went on. "He's very fond of Harriet, deep down, I think, but he's teased her too much about eating. And because he got me there, Harriet's probably got it in for me to get back at him. But do you know, Dad, I like her."

"That's the most necessary thing. There's an old saying that love breaks rocks. So liking ought to crack 'em. Oughtn't it?" Mr. Randall looked at his daughter with approval.

"I do hope you'll make a go of it, dear," Mrs. Randall said. "Twenty-five dollars a week is not to be sneezed at."

"You haven't heard Jess sneeze, have you?" Mr. Randall asked. It warmed Jess to have her father understand. He was a grand father. She loved her mother, but it was to her father she knew she would go when she needed counsel. That night she had a long entry for her diary.

JESS STEPS OUT

Received from
READER'S SERVICE
Presb. Board of Foreign Missions

7



How shrewd was Jess's analysis of Harriet the next three weeks demonstrated.

From Monday to Friday inclusive Jess utilized all her tact, her will power, her niceness, and her enthusiasm, to implant in her tutee the simpler facts of Latin, history, and algebra. She might as well have struggled to teach them to a cat.

Harriet, with a body of wax, had a will of steel. Never rude, never openly rebellious, she nevertheless conducted a one-girl sit-down strike so subtly, so effectively, that Jess could find no prod, no punishment, which might advance her.

Jess passed through many stages of mood, from concern to bafflement and on to near despair. The obvious thing to do was to thrash out the whole business with Mrs. Wolverton. But Jess had seen her employer only three or four times. She was either lunching with others of the summer colony, or, if at home, there were always guests and Jess was not expected to appear at lunch. Mrs. Wolverton lived in a cloud of entertainment, and Jess had already divined that it was Harriet's

JESS

happiness rather than her mastery of declensions and the value of x that concerned her. A new fear had been growing in Jess, too, and this kept her from such an interview. She dreaded being told that she was not a success, and the stoppage of her weekly check.

Jess had started an account in the bank. By the end of the summer she would have at least \$250 on deposit, and \$250 (actual money instead of dream money like her \$25,000 prize) was riches. She could give wonderful presents at Christmas. There were so many things her mother had long wanted. Or she might even visit New York and sit in the same room with Mr. Fadiman and Mr. Kieran. There was practically nothing you couldn't do with \$250, and it was maddening to have this sum threatened by the crankiness of a spoiled, too-well-fed girl who had all the brains in the world if she wanted to employ them.

Bill, too, had become very elusive. The great summer places were open now and Bill was dashing off in the morning for tennis, staying away for lunch, playing golf in the afternoons. After the first morning he had not come for Jess, as a short cut made this unnecessary, and he was rarely down to breakfast in time, anyway. Jess longed to have a talk with him. She looked back on that May afternoon of fishing with him as a dream of heaven. She was stern with herself. She told herself who she was and who Bill was and how impossi-

JESS STEPS OUT

ble any sustained companionship would be, but these wise reflections did not diminish the emptiness in her by one ache.

Harriet had not responded to Jess's outdoor enthusiasms any better than to the scholastic duties. Oftener and oftener she would say, "I shall be out for lunch today," or, "I'm going yachting with the Haverills this afternoon." Jess began to feel that the money she was accepting was undeserved.

The first time this thought occurred she put it away, but it came back. Mr. Randall had a Puritan conscience and he had instilled it in Jess. Honesty, self-honesty — that was the foundation of happiness.

One Saturday evening, Jess had a quiet talk with her father. She told him that she had been working with Harriet for a month and totally without visible results. Must she see Mrs. Wolverton about it? Was she cheating?

"As the world sees things, Jess," Mr. Randall said, after a silence, "you're entirely justified in taking the money. You're doing your best, and if Harriet doesn't benefit by it, that's her loss. Also, if Mrs. Wolverton isn't interested enough to check up on you and find out how things are going, that, as the world goes, is her lookout."

Jess was surprised. "Then you think I needn't speak to her?"

"I didn't say that. I said that the world wouldn't blame you. But the world is notoriously shortsighted in such mat-

JESS

ters. It is mainly concerned with getting rich and no questions asked. It regards the finer ethics as so much foolishness. It'd say you were soft to risk a good thing for a scruple of conscience. But you and I know differently. You can't cheat God and have that wonderful carefree happiness which is peace. You can't even be subtle about it. I think, and I believe you think or you wouldn't have brought up the matter, that you'd be a notch higher, ethically, if you laid the whole thing before Mrs. Wolverton."

"But suppose she agrees with me that it's money wasted, Dad? "

"That's the risk that goes with being honest," Mr. Randall said gravely. "I've seen the honest man lose out, temporarily, many's the time. He pays something on his income tax that he could have concealed forever. He'd have nothing worse to fear than a spot on his conscience. But he knows that spot is an acid. It eats a larger hole. It destroys his true God-given peace by so much. Good people, Jess, believe that God stands up for right doers, and I haven't a doubt that he'll stand up for you if you do what you consider's right in this matter. That makes the risk rather fun, don't you think? "

"I never thought of it that way, Dad."

"It's a good way. You do what's right and then you wait to see how good works out from it. I've tried it a few times and the result is rarely what you imagine it's going to be. It's

JESS STEPS OUT

almost always surprising. But it's always sure. Talk about adventure! "

"You're wonderful, Dad!" Jess exclaimed. "I believe I'll do it." Then she paused. "But how do you know, Dad, whether a thing *is* right? Sometimes I get myself in a perfect stew over it and don't know the difference between what is *really* right and what's just a sort of inflammation of the conscience."

Mr. Randall laughed. "Let me return the compliment, daughter. You're great. Inflammation of the conscience! I'll tell your mother that the next time she fusses too much. But to answer your question I'd suggest another. To be entirely honest, Mr. Meekom gave me the clue years ago. He got off a sermon he called 'The Question.' It was the same question as yours, and he said you could always answer it by asking yourself, 'Would this please God?' He said that God keeps a small information bureau in your heart to provide the correct answers. And it's true. You *know*, if you don't stop to argue, whether one action will please God better than another."

"I'll ask to see Mrs. Wolverton on Monday," Jess said.

Jess's decision was strengthened on Monday by Harriet's conduct. She seemed to have laid in a fresh supply of non-resistance over the week end. Jess had planned to say nothing

JESS

about the interview to Harriet, but she did want to talk to Bill. When she had given her pupil an algebra problem to work, she asked if she could see her brother.

"Bill's away, visiting, thank goodness," Harriet said. "I should think he would have told you."

This quiet remark was cruel, as it was meant to be, for Harriet had divined on their first day together that Jess was romantically impressed by her shining brother.

Jess attempted a little passive resistance of her own, but it did not work. Harriet's steady gaze had noted that her first blow was a hit and continued: "He's visiting Elaine Cromwell, if you want to know. He's crazy about her, and I must say it shows more than his usual good taste."

Jess remained silent, for the foolish unreasonable hurt inside her was spreading. "You may have a chance to see her — in the distance," Harriet went on. "Bill's going to give a house party in a couple of weeks, and she'll be here."

"Let's talk about that later, Harriet," Jess said. "Now I want to know if you understand what you're to do in this problem."

"You don't want that half as much as to hear more about Elaine," Harriet said with a smile which had no good humor in it. "She's the prettiest girl in the Junior League, and she'll have a million dollars the day she's twenty-one. . . ."

"I won't show her! . . . I won't show that she's hurt-

JESS STEPS OUT

ing me!" Jess said to herself, "I won't give her one cent's worth of satisfaction."

"I shouldn't wonder if Bill was engaged to her secretly," Harriet proceeded, still watching Jess. "I hope he is, for then he might let me alone."

Jess managed a smile and said: "I'd rather have you on my side than anybody in the world, Harriet. I don't believe there's anything you couldn't do."

This unexpected response to her intended wounding took Harriet by surprise. "You don't know me . . . Nobody does," she said.

"That's true. But what I said goes, on the little I do know."

"Then you can't be as smart as Bill thinks," Harriet retorted before she had reflected.

Jess saw how unintentional this remark was and felt victorious. She was firm now about the algebra and Harriet submitted with more grace. After tutoring time Jess, without letting Harriet know, requested Saunders to ask if Mrs. Wolverton would see her. The butler returned to say that Mrs. Wolverton would receive her upstairs.

Harriet's mother had become one of Jess's secret admirations. She made Jess feel as if one had a foot in the stirring world. She not only wore the most satisfying clothes Jess had ever imagined; she made it seem as if exquisite rightness

JESS

was the most natural thing in the world. Her suits and hats and slippers were as right and effective as the leaves that supported a lily of the valley. She always looked as cool as a flower, and Jess made pictures of the enchanting times she must have. She was always going somewhere, surrounded by dazzling people, living at party speed. Not even yet had Jess had a real word with her, not an approach to a discussion about Harriet's work. But Jess, while surprised, was no longer disapproving. Mrs. Wolverton's command of manner forced forgiveness. Now, as Jess climbed the broad staircase, she was more excited than nervous. It was as if she were being given audience by a queen.

A maid opened the door at Jess's knock. The large chintz-cool room, with its seven windows, offered an enormous view of the sea. Mrs. Wolverton, as Jess saw with a tremor of disappointment, was preparing to go out. The maid resumed adjusting her veil, and Mrs. Wolverton appeared irritated. "I am in a little of a rush, Miss Randall. What is it you wish to speak about?"

Jess explained, very briefly.

"No, Nellie," Mrs. Wolverton broke in, "not on that side."

Nellie seemed nervous. Jess, hoping that Mrs. Wolverton was listening, finished by saying that she wanted to be sure she was earning her salary.

JESS STEPS OUT

Mrs. Wolverton, who had been studying the effect of the veil, laid down the hand mirror and said in her delightfully cool voice: "I am quite sure that you are right, Miss Randall. I felt certain that you could not do anything with Harriet and told Bill so. Harriet is a most difficult child."

Jess was stunned and felt the blood rushing into her face. She had just made a tremendous sacrifice and had expected an equal consideration. The least Mrs. Wolverton could do, she had supposed, was to say: "I appreciate your frankness, Miss Randall. We must go into the matter," or, "Not at all, Miss Randall. I can't think of letting you go. I'll have a talk with Harriet. I do appreciate your honesty in coming to me."

Nellie was still fussing with the veil. "Then what do you think I should do, Mrs. Wolverton?" Jess asked in a shaken voice.

"Nellie, please let it alone. It's right, now," Mrs. Wolverton said and rose. She glanced at Jess and said: "I really think it's best to give up the little experiment, Miss Randall. I agree fully with all that you say about Harriet. I consider it very unwise to spoil her summer, if nothing is to be gained, don't you?" Mrs. Wolverton took the gloves that Nellie held out and then smiled, coolly but with immaculate charm, at the planted girl. "Now, if you will excuse me, I must fly. I've appreciated your effort *so* much, Miss Randall. Mr.



JESS

Wolverton's secretary will send you a check for an additional week, which I am sure will be satisfactory. Thank you so much and good-by."

Jess's cheeks burned as she descended those wide easy stairs. She had been a fool. She had eased herself out of a job by being honest, and *her* side of it had meant less to Mrs. Wolverton than the hang of a veil.

A fierce resentment against such selfishness began to burn in her. Mrs. Wolverton, beautiful, charming, rich, idle, care-free — in Jess's eyes — had less heart than a marble column. She had never for a moment considered *her*. Every thought had been for her own looks or for that sleekly lazy Harriet, who was as completely self-centered as her mother. Jess's rage spread to the girl who, by the littlest co-operation, could have given both of them a perfect summer.

Tears smarted in Jess's eyes as she crossed the spacious, beautiful hall for the last time. They were tears of rage at her stupidity as well as at the others' selfishness. She had forgotten her original motive of doing right and entrusting the outcome to a higher Power. She was as engulfed in self, as she went out into the sunlight, as the people she reproached. Harriet was not visible and Jess had no desire to hunt her up and see the gloat of triumph in her eyes. She, Jess, had *banded* her the victory! She hated herself for her silly soft-

JESS STEPS OUT

ness. Her chagrin mounted so on her walk home that she could scarcely face her family.

Fortunately her mother was at the church, sewing for the Red Cross. Jess went upstairs to her most understanding friend, and wrote:

“ July 14

“ I’m through. I’ve been meek long enough. I let that reporter get away with cheating me. I let Eddie Briggs get away without giving me my desserts. I let Bill believe or disbelieve my fish as he pleased. I let Harriet get away with her smooth insubordination. I let her mother throw me out at *my* request. I’m very, *very* tired of being a ninny, a nobody. I’ve got brains and I don’t do what I plan. It’s my fault that Maine Point and everyone else think I’m *simply* a female Simple Simon.

“ Well, I’ll show them. ‘ Nothing venture, nothing gain.’ That’s what they say to you when they want you to do something for *them*. Well, it can work both ways. I’ve learned that lesson. I vanish tonight, and the family can find out why. I can’t *bear* to have all Maine Point laughing at me for being such a sap. They can *pay* to see me in the movies. When I next write on this page, I shall have something to say besides *I wish . . . I hope . . . I wasn’t able . . .* ”

JESS

Jess changed her clothes and went down into the kitchen. An hour later she was gone.

"I declare I don't know what that girl won't be into next!" Miss Malvinia exclaimed on the evening she heard of Jess's disappearance. Miss Malvinia, as the female Paul Revere of village news, had gone straight to Mr. Struthers at the post office. "What are her parents thinking of, letting her roam off into the woods like a stray cat? If my heart wasn't so large, I'd have trouble finding sympathy in it for them."

"I'd let her stay there if I was them," Mr. Struthers remarked in his dry rasp. "She's never knowed when she was well off, that girl. Always itching to go somewheres like New York or Palm Beach or Mozambique."

"Mozambique!" exclaimed the affronted Miss Malvinia.

"That's what she said, only day before yesterday. No, Saturday it was. 'Oh, Mr. Struthers,' she says, 'I do wish you'd put a stamp on me and send me to Mozambique, parcel post.' And me not knowing where Mozambique is even."

"I've always said her father should take her in hand," Miss Malvinia said severely. "She talks about Rudy Vallée and Joe DiMaggio and Lady Astor as if she knew them. It all comes from associating with the summer people too much. They turn her head."

JESS STEPS OUT

"That's right. Well, she turned it too much this time, tryin' to tell Mrs. Wolverton what she should be paid."

"What? What's that?" Miss Malvinia asked sharply. This was real news. "Who told you that?"

"Mrs. Wolverton's maid. She was in the room when Jess come in and said she wasn't satisfied taking Mrs. Wolverton's money. Can you fancy that?"

"Imagine!" Miss Malvinia cried. "Isn't that just like Jess for all the world. Never satisfied one minute. Never thinks of her mother slaving away in that kitchen while she runs the woods, and deliberately throws Mrs. Wolverton's money back in her face like it wasn't good enough for her. I should think she'd be *ashamed!*"

"Not her!" commented Mr. Struthers. "She's beyond me."

"I must run on," Miss Malvinia said. "One two-cent stamp, please. I feel that it is my duty to comfort *poor* Mrs. Randall, though what I can say I'm sure I don't know."

She turned away from the window and didn't hear Mr. Struthers mutter: "You'll find something, I dare say. I ain't never seed you stumped for words yet."

The July twilight had faded. The shade of the maples and elms in front of the Randall home was cellar-black. Mrs. Randall, sitting very stiff and rocking worriedly on the porch,

JESS

looked at her husband and said: "Well, I can't help it, Elbert. I'm worried. Here it is half past nine nearly, and no sign of her."

"I'd be worried, too, if she'd gone out for a stroll on the road. Speeding cars pick off a man here, a child there, like sharpshooters in the American Revolution. But Jess can take care of herself in the woods."

"That's what we said about Eddie Briggs and it took *days* to find him."

"Don't let Jess hear you compare her with Eddie." Mr. Randall laughed, a short nervous laugh.

"I wish she *could* hear me. Elbert, I'll go frantic if Jess doesn't come in soon."

"The woods are as safe as her room, only bigger, and a little more confusing."

"I don't care what you say. I'm going to telephone Sheriff Poulson. I'm going to do it now."

"And have the village . . ."

Mrs. Randall rose. "I don't care what the village thinks. Jess is in trouble somewhere."

Mr. Randall rose, too. "If there's any phoning to be done, I'll do it."

"I've phoned a dozen people," Mrs. Randall said curtly. "It's no secret."

"*You* did?" Mr. Randall was annoyed. "Jess will be

JESS STEPS OUT

hurt. She'll think you have no confidence in her. Who did you phone? "

" The Wolvertons, naturally. I thought they might have taken her off on some party. But I found she hadn't even stayed to lunch. So then I phoned Mrs. Briggs — you know Jess keeps saying how she ought to go out there and help. And she hadn't seen her. So I called up Miss Tottem and Miss Malvinia and Mr. Struthers and some of her school friends. I wish I'd called Mr. Poulson, too. I mean again. I did call him but he was out."

" But Jess's note . . . "

" I didn't find her note, I tell you, until afterward. I don't see why she left it in her room instead of on the kitchen table as she always does."

" In a hurry, no doubt."

Mr. Randall went indoors. He heard his wife say, " Oh, good evening, Miss Malvinia." He determined to stay indoors. Miss Malvinia reminded him of a raven, always circling around where there was trouble.

Jess reached her first hiding place on Nameless Pond when the shadows of the pines and hemlocks had already crept far out upon its waters.

The pressure of time had telescoped the plans she had once confided to her diary. She had had no opportunity to prepare

JESS

her parcels of food. She did wrap up a very little, but anything of consequence would be missed. And of course, as she told herself, she *ought* to look thinner on being found after *six* days in the woods.

The note was the result of a severe argument with her conscience. She would have preferred to disappear without trace but could not bear to alarm her father and mother unduly. She must leave a hint that she was lost in the woods, not on the bay. Nobody had got *very* worried over Eddie Briggs the first day or so; her family could remember that and keep cool. It was hard to select words that didn't tell a lie. After three attempts she found the formula:

It's such a nice day I'm going up Alder Brook. I'm determined to catch a fish bigger than Bill's. Be back when you see me. I left Jason tied up on purpose.

Jess.

Jason had been a worry. He was a stupid dog and she did not believe that he could track her half a mile. However, on reaching Alder Brook, she had taken off her shoes and stockings and crossed in order to destroy any possible scent. Also she waded for a hundred yards in the outlet of Nameless Pond for the same reason.

Now she was safe for at least a day. Her mother would

JESS STEPS OUT

not find the note until dark and no search would be started until the next morning, and the searchers would content themselves with a patrol of Alder Brook. Nameless Pond was the last place they would look, since its fish were very small, and they would know she hadn't lost her head like Eddie Briggs. They would suspect that she had turned an ankle severely.

The evening was perfect for her adventure. In mid-July the nights were at their warmest, and yet the black flies had gone for the season and it had been dry enough to discourage the remaining mosquitoes. Jess decided not to sleep in a cave and began to look for another place. She had half circled the little pond when she found precisely the right shelter. An enormous spruce tree had blown over in some furious gust and its tip had been caught in another tree, partly felled. The green apron of branches provided roof and walls, a room nobody would suspect was a room, and from which she could watch the back trail unseen. If anyone did penetrate to Nameless on a venture, she could see them coming and duck back into the forest. Even if she did not care to watch, the nook was proof against the eyes of a person standing ten feet away, and the dryness of the needles underneath showed that the thick thatch of evergreen had shed rain like an umbrella.

Jess sat down with the first contentment of the day. The sun had left the pond and was yellowing the upper branches of the encircling spruce and fir. As Jess gazed at the sedate

JESS

and venerable trees she thought, "They're just like uncles and aunts." The air was warm. The silence did not seem unfriendly. Jess took out the second volume of her diary, resolved that nothing should interfere with its continuity.

"July 14

"Nameless Pond

"The great adventure has begun. A week from today it will be over and everything entirely changed. If *this* doesn't work, I give up. No, I won't. I shall *never* give up, but it will work. Eddie Briggs was famous in three days, and how did he act? Just like a boy, that is, just like a sheep. He didn't *care*. I thought every boy wanted to be great. That's what you read in books. But Eddie wants pie. I like to read about men like Henry David Thoreau who built that hut by a pond like Nameless. *He* wanted something and he got it and it made him famous.

"And that's another thing. He went off and lived as he chose for two years and Concord Village couldn't stop him. I don't doubt they talked their heads off, or shook them off, over it. If Miss Malvinia or Mr. Struthers knew I was doing this of my own wish and plan, they'd hold up their hands in holy horror and say I was crazy. Grownups are utterly ridiculous. Miss Tottem gives me a biography of a man who wanted something more than he wanted anything else, and

JESS STEPS OUT

she says, 'Now there, child, is a wonderful example of what pluck and imagination will accomplish.' Then if you follow the example, they say, 'Have you *completely* lost your senses?'

"I must use these precious days to think about my future. What I *really* want to do. First, I want my questions used on *Information, Please*. Next, I want to be invited to *We, the People*. And *this* will do it . . ."

Jess looked out over the graying pond. The forest was dreaming. A nighthawk swooping for its evening catch of insects made a muffled sound that thrilled her. A hermit thrush, singing far up some leafy glen, poured curlicues of crystal tone on the still air. One lonely frog gr-r-rumped at the edge of the pond.

Jess let the notebook slip from her lap. She could write tomorrow. Now it was pleasant to dream along with evening and imagine the stir at home. They would be wondering by now what had happened. Her mother would telephone. The village would spread the news. That was a pleasant certainty. Perhaps it would reach the *Times* soon. Her father would phone the Wolvertons, because he didn't know she wasn't wanted there any more . . .

For an instant that bitter fact roiled the sweetness of her reverie. But, even if Mrs. Wolverton didn't care, or even



JESS

Harriet, Bill would. If *only* he hadn't gone visiting. But wherever he was, he could read about it in the paper, in a day or so. "Why, I know that girl!" Jess could hear him exclaiming to this rich and beautiful Elaine he was with. "I could find her. I found Eddie Briggs. I *will* find her." And Elaine would say: "Don't go back to Maine Point yet, Bill. What is she to you?" And Bill would say: "Why, she's a wonderful girl. You wait and see. She's ambitious. She doesn't belong in that sleepy village. They'll wake up when she's gone to New York. She'll be a star in the movies someday. You watch. Of course I'm going now . . ."

It was wonderful to hear Bill's voice in her mind championing her. Jess knew now what was really behind her impatience to be noticed, important. She must be somebody in *his* eyes.

It was dark now behind her, though the sky was not quite ready for its first star. Jess undid her package of food. She was ravenous.

She stretched, grateful for the early sun.

The first night was over. It had been nothing at all. She had kindled a little fire for company. Her bed of fir branch-lets was soft and fresh-smelling. She had been cool but too sleepy to fix the fire better and then oblivion had taken her tired body. It couldn't be so early after all. The sun was

JESS STEPS OUT

actually hours high. It might be nine o'clock or even later.

Had she been scared, she asked herself? She remembered a scampering noise, and an owl had sounded like a little boy lost. The loneliness in the middle of the night, when the owl woke her, had seemed almost like a person, a dark threatening person without a face. But she knew nothing would happen. There wasn't anything *to* happen. She had told Mrs. Briggs that, so why not believe it for herself? If you couldn't believe what you told other people, you were a liar. If you couldn't believe what you told yourself, you were a coward. The thing was to be sure, then believe, against all fears. That was the secret.

She stole down to the pond's edge to wash her face. That made her feel better, like herself. But it didn't remove the hollowness inside. She had brought lots of tea, but dare she kindle a fire now? Even a little one?

Well, perhaps so. If she knew her mother, the searchers would already have started. But they couldn't possibly be nearer than Alder Brook, and no smoke she would make could give her away.

She dipped up some water in the little pail she'd brought, one that her mother could not miss, and made an experienced fire, just the tiniest amount of flame needed. The smell of the kindling birchbark was delicious, homey. It made her think of breakfast at home, and suddenly home, her re-

JESS

sponsibility to her family, kerplunked into her consciousness like the frog she had startled into diving into the water.

The tea tasted good, even out of the tin lid of the pail, and she ate half of her remaining sandwiches. She could get thin later, when she had to. But her mind was on that question making a to-do in her consciousness. As soon as she could she took up her diary. Things became clearer on paper.

“ July 15

“ Nameless Pond

“ I thought I was going to enjoy being lost. The time, especially if I slept this late, would go very fast. And now Mr. Meekom is bothering me. He says there's only one question one need ask: Would this please God?

“ Well, I don't know why it wouldn't. God certainly wants us to use our powers or he wouldn't have given them to us. God can hardly object to my becoming famous and appearing on *We, the People* since he's given me the brains to plan it out.

“ Yet my conscience is talking back. Yesterday I was so furious at Mrs. Wolverton that I didn't think of everything calmly enough. I knew that coming here would worry Father and Mother very much. But I thought how happy they'd be later, when I succeeded, and made money to help

JESS STEPS OUT

them. Dad is always saying there's a price for everything, so why shouldn't they pay a little of the price, too?

"That's how I argued yesterday. Now my conscience says that this is all bunk. That I'm making it up to try and fool Mr. Conscience, who now insists that it's wrong to hurt Dad and Mother this way, and that I should go home, and tell everything without even a little falsehood.

"But haven't I ruined everything so far by being *soft*? I'm even ruining this minute. Everything is going this very moment as I planned it. I ought to be happy and I'm miserable, not from homesickness, not from hunger, but simply because that pair of scales in my spirit, I guess you call it, doesn't balance. It's funny, if you are doing right and the scales balance, you feel peaceful and calm, no matter what happens. But if you're having fun and yet haven't put enough *good* in one scale, you feel upset and jumpy and thinking back all the time.

"Sometime I shall write down these dialogues that Mr. Conscience has with me. For instance, now:

"Mr. C. — If you really want to feel right, Jess, you will pack up your pail and get home by lunch time. You can't get around me by argument, you know. I will give you no peace.

"Jess. — Let me ask you something, Mr. Conscience.

JESS

Did you plague Mr. Emerson this way when he was writing *Self-Reliance*? Did you make him feel uncomfortable by advising him that he was going to make others unhappy?

“Mr. C. — Stick to the point, please. I’m *your* conscience. You have deceived. You are causing pain. Your object is self-gratification. Self-reliance doesn’t rely on tricks. It is too proud to go behind people’s backs. It dislikes flattery and even praise. Would you like *him* to know this? Would you want *him* to see how really small you are?

“Jess. — No, I think I’d die of shame unless I could tell him that it was to be worthy of him, to be worth his knowing, I mean, that made me do this.

“Mr. C. — A bad means to a dubious end. Get this, Jess, and I’ll leave you alone for days at a time. It’s true, as your father says, a good end does not justify a bad means. It’s true, as Mr. Meekom says, you’ll never get far in the direction of good by doing wrong. It’s true, as you ought to know, a person goes in the direction he’s looking. So put out your fire, get up, and start in the right direction, Jess. Be your real self . . .”

Jess paused. She had lost and knew it. Yet, before she actually gave in and started home, she wanted to raid her mind for arguments, although she knew in the back of it that

JESS STEPS OUT

mere mental argument was hopeless. Somehow you couldn't get *behind* Mr. Conscience.

Jess looked out over the pond, a picture of peace in its new morning. A thin streamer of lightest blue smoke rose from her fire. She must put this out. She stooped to get a handful of soil. A branch behind her snapped with a sharp crack. Jess started, turned, and saw Bill Wolverton, flannel-shirted, robust, grinning, and holding Jason on a leash. "So there you are!" he said.

"Oh!" Jess's exclamation was of utter surprise, of dismay, and also of that inner lightness she always felt when Bill arrived.

He came toward her and held out his hand, "Robinsonia Crusoe . . . Mr. Friday."

"How *did* you . . ." Jess stopped, seeing that she was about to give herself away.

"Thank Jason," Bill said and looked down. Jess noticed that Jason was exhibiting a formal, an extremely neutral, pleasure in reunion and moved over to stand a step closer to Bill. "A remarkable hound," Bill went on. "I don't see how you could forget him."

Jess was searching Bill's broad smile. Something was very wrong. Bill was showing not the least sign of relief at having found her, the lost one. Then she remembered that she

JESS

had shown none at being found. "I didn't forget him. I left him home purposely. He scares the trout."

"I see." Bill's grin widened. He hummed a bit of tune in that pensive, maddening way of Charlie McCarthy.

Jess was trying to think quickly. It wasn't too late to show some gratitude. "You're wonderful, Bill. Here I am . . . caught out by darkness and you come to bring me home before anybody has time to get worried."

"That's right," Bill said with a most irritating mirth. "Not a reporter stirring . . . not even a newsreeler."

"Why do you say that?" Jess asked. "Why should they?" Then, because she didn't want his answer, she went on, "Were Dad and Mother awfully worried?"

"Oh, no! I told them not to be."

Jess felt uncomfortable. This meeting was too different from the meeting she had dreamed to make sense. Bill was concealing something amusing. "And Mother believed you?" Jess asked.

"A very sensible woman, your mother."

"I was terribly afraid she'd be frantic . . . So soon after Eddie Briggs, too." Suddenly Jess thought of another omission and said, "I'm starving. Did you bring anything to eat?"

For answer Bill broke into an irrepressible and most tantalizing laugh.

THANK YOU, MR. [Name]

Received from
READER'S SERVICE
Presb. Board of Foreign Missions

8



JESS had never felt more frustrated, more furious. The romantic moment of this finding lacked all the romance she had pictured. Bill was laughing! Without saying so in words, he was making fun of her. Yet why? He couldn't guess that she had *planned* to be lost. He couldn't.

"*Why* are you so hateful?" she burst out under the strain of all the injustice and disappointment. "I wish you'd let me find my way back alone. I see where I am now. If I stayed out too late fishing and decided to sleep in the . . . under a tree instead of *feeling* my way home in the dark, I don't see why you have to come and laugh at me. I know I'm ridiculous. Harriet has made that plain to you, I suppose. And your mother thinks so. But I hoped you'd be friends and . . . and believe I wasn't *entirely* a fool." She felt the tears coming now, honest tears, and her one urge was to escape this hateful situation, to run away from the heart-breaking sight of the one wonderful person she would have

JESS

done anything for laughing at her misery. "Come, Jason," she commanded.

Her hound heard, looked up at her, then twisted around to consult Bill. It was a small thing, but in that poignant moment it was the final stab in Jess's heart. Even her dog liked Bill better. She couldn't even win a dog! A sob made a loud ugly sound. Hot tears blinded her so that as she started to run she tripped on a bump of earth and fell.

Bill was kneeling by her at once. She felt his firm hand on her shoulder, heard his voice, his own true, sincere, and wonderful voice, saying, "Jess . . . Jess . . ."

"No . . ."

"Please, Jess . . . I can't bear to see you cry."

"Then go 'way."

"Never."

He was sitting beside her now, his knee touching her shoulder, his hand warm and gentle. She lay face down sobbing into the darkness of earth. "Please go," she begged. "I'm so . . . ashamed."

"Jess, forgive me." His voice was tender and concerned.

"Yes . . . but just go."

"No . . . I have something nice to tell you."

She lay there, calming a little, smelling the cool scent of the woods earth, knowing that he was sitting quietly waiting for her. Presently she sat up, with her back to him, dabbing

THANK YOU, MR. C.

at her eyes with her sleeve. A fresh handkerchief was dangled over her shoulder and she took it with a murmured "Thanks."

She could not face him yet. She looked at the spire of a fir reflected in the pond, and it strengthened her. It was leaning, undermined by the water, yet so beautiful and calm. An envelope dropped over her shoulder into her lap. "Take a squint at that," Bill said.

It was a violet-tinted envelope with "For Miss Jessie Randall" written in extravagantly large letters on it.

My dear Miss Randall,

Just a word to say that I fear I accepted your too-modest estimate of your services somewhat hastily this morning. Harriet is so disappointed at the thought of missing your companionship that I hope you will find it possible to come to us as usual tomorrow.

Cordially yours,

Alice Massey Wolverton.

July fourteenth.

Jess turned slightly, enough to see Bill's face, grave and good-looking, and his eyes had nothing of that teasing laughter left in them. "It's true," he said. "Harriet does want you back."

"Harriet misses me the way I miss mosquitoes," Jess said, replacing the note in the envelope.

JESS

"Don't underestimate Harriet, as I've been doing," Bill said. "I tell you it's true."

"You did it," Jess said. "You made your mother write that. I know that."

"Certainly. I led up to it. I got back from the Cromwells' yesterday, a few hours after you fired yourself. Mother was out, of course. We keep our home to be out of. I found Harriet looking smirky, like a cat full of forbidden goldfish, and she told me what had happened. I was sore, mad, angry, furious. I told her she'd missed the chance of her life. 'I'm always missing the chance of my life, according to you,' Harriet said. You know that cool smooth way she has of talking without raising her voice. 'You never stop to consider whether it is *my* life or not. You do nothing but meddle. You wanted Miss Randall to have a job, so you pick on me. I don't like to be picked on. So she hasn't got a job any more.' 'Your stupidity is only matched by your selfishness,' I said, for I was hopping. 'Jess is the nicest and ablest girl I know, and you freeze her out. You and Mother.'"

"Oh, Bill, you didn't say that!" Jess exclaimed and thought, Suppose it were true!

"Cross my heart," Bill said earnestly. "I said to her, 'To take out a spite on me, you lose a chance to learn what you'd give your right eye to learn. You're a stupid little female

THANK YOU, MR. C.

ape, and you've hurt a person whose only fault is that she didn't break your fat neck! ' "

" Oh, Bill, you didn't! " Jess gasped. " Do you think she'll ever want to see me again? " "

Bill held up his hand. " Wait. You don't know women. They're curious. Harriet said: ' What did you think I couldn't learn? Not those lessons. I could do them in my sleep. It took all the brains I have to *not* do them and just *seem* stupid. I was sorry for Miss Randall because she was so fair. If you'd been fair, I'd've worked. See? It's all your own conceited fault.' Then I said: ' I wasn't thinking about the lessons, or the outdoor stuff. You'll never be able to roll your body around enough for that. I was thinking of her cooking.' She perked up at that, as I knew she would. So I went on: ' You want to be the best cook in that crazy Luncheon Club of yours. You want to astonish all the other little fatties. Well, you've missed your big chance. Jess is a better cook than Franchot ever will be. Jess can stir up a clam chowder that'd make the Sphinx's mouth water and drip down on the sand. Jess can do lobster à la Newburg so that the lobster would rave over itself. She can do Maine dishes your old club never heard of. You could go back next fall and throw an all-Maine meal that'd drive all your sub-deb friends to go out and fall on their carving knives in despair.' "

JESS

"Bill, what a fib!" Jess exclaimed with her first smile.

"The truest sales talk ever man got off," Bill contradicted.

"Do you remember the chowder you concocted on that beach picnic? One spoonful of that was worth all the fancy dishes in the French dictionary. Anyhow, don't interrupt. It worked. Harriet confessed she'd missed that trick, and I could see she felt mean taking it out on you to get even at me. And I told her I was going to turn over a new leaf. I am, too. I'm not going to be critical. I'm going to supply you with a long pin you can stick into me every time I show the least sign of being hateful to the girl. We really made up, Jess, and it's thanks to you."

"That's wonderful, Bill," Jess said, growing more happy every moment. "Harriet has loads to her . . ."

"I won't say it," and Bill smiled.

Jess slapped his knee. "For lack of the pin," she said.

"But Harriet has. But I still don't see how you . . ."

"Everything in order," Bill said. "Harriet and I both went to Mother. I explained that it was pretty low to fire a girl just because she had a conscience, and Harriet said she wanted you to come back. Of course Mother agreed. Incidentally I mentioned that you were slightly more worth while than all the Wolvertons put together."

"Bill!" Jess was thrilled, provoked, and amused. "You wretch! Now how can I go back?"

THANK YOU, MR. C.

"The funny thing," Bill said seriously, "is that it's true. We're just a crew of easygoing loafers floating along on Dad's income, and you grub away in a village as big as a shoe box and become a *person*. A great light has suddenly broken on me, Jess."

This was becoming so like the wonderful talks that Jess had had with Bill in her daydreams that happiness had already washed out all her misery. "I wish I could think so, Bill," she murmured.

"I'll tell you why someday," Bill said. His voice had dropped into that soft serious register which made Jess sing inside the way pines sang in the first air of spring. He looked at his wrist watch. "For a starving girl, you're exceptionally patient. Do you know it's nearly noon? I must get you home before they do worry."

At that moment Jess made a great decision. She would tell him. He might laugh at her again, yet she wouldn't care now. There was something solid beneath, something they were both standing on, which mattered more. She would be honest, would let nothing come between them. The decision had the taste of clear, cold spring water. "I'm not starving, Bill," she said quietly. "I brought enough for . . . for quite a while. I . . . I thought I might get lost." She looked at him anxiously.

Bill did not laugh, or even smile. "I guessed as much,

JESS

Jess. I smelled something phony in the state of Denmark."

"But how?"

"After Harriet and I had seen Mother, I hotfooted it down to your place to tell you. About ten. Your people were on the porch trying not to get into a stew . . ."

"Did you tell them what you guessed?" Jess asked faintly.

Bill shook his head. "That was your secret. Now it's mine and yours."

Relief, gratitude, the wonderful joy in finding him so understanding, almost dampened her eyes again. "But you haven't told me how you guessed?" she asked.

"Oh, little things. The way you worded that note. The mood you must have been in after leaving Mother, because it was terribly unjust. The fact that you *couldn't* be lost unless you wanted to. Maybe I'm a great detective. Maybe you and I can read each other's thoughts, Jess."

She got up from the spruce-needed ground to hide her happiness. Nameless Pond was a little patch of water mirror-bright under the sun. Its firs and spruces pointed into a cloudless sky. That place, that moment, seemed to Jess the most beautiful place and moment in the world.

Her home-coming was as different from her picture of it as her camping clothes from some gorgeous display of fashion

THANK YOU, MR. C.

in a Fifth Avenue window. There was no reporter, no news-reel man, no group of cheering neighbors, nobody to remind her that she would soon be going on the air. Yet, as Bill left her and Jason at her gate, she did not really miss the turmoil of her dreams. After all, it was far, far more satisfying to have one person who truly cared what you did and what you were going to do, who could smile with his lips and look at you with eyes that understood. Why hadn't she guessed?

"Please come in," Jess begged. "They'll want to thank you for recovering their darling daughter."

"Tell them to send the reward up to the house — in person," Bill laughed back. "I'll come for you tomorrow. I think we're going to have a very good time this summer. Be seeing you. . . ."

Then he was gone. Jess braced herself for the entry into her own home.

Mrs. Randall was at the telephone. Jess heard her say: "No . . . No, not yet . . . We're trying not to worry. Mr. Bill Wolverton is sure he can find her. He's taken Jason. If he doesn't find her by this afternoon, the sheriff is taking a search party . . ."

Jess wondered how apparitions materialized without startling too much. "Mother," she said softly.

Mrs. Randall looked up and gave a little scream. "She's



JESS

here! She's back! " she cried into the receiver and hung up. Jess was in her arms, comforting her, laughing.

Later, after going to her room and depositing her diary with Volume I, which was undisturbed in its cache in her closet, Jess sat a long while on the edge of her bed, thinking.

Jess remembered, later, what her father had said when she had told him that Mrs. Wolverton was courteous: " That's their profession."

It was amazing how smoothly the joining together of her last session with Harriet and the first on the new basis had been effected. In Maine Point circles a quarrel was a division that might last for years. Mr. and Mrs. Brivett had not said a word to each other for five months following Mr. Brivett's forgetting to buy Mrs. Brivett some ribbon down at Miss Simpson's. The feud between the Hortons and the Healys had lasted for two years. It had been occasioned by Mr. Healy's giving a thrashing to the Hortons' oldest boy who had given a thrashing to the Healys' son. Maine Point was split into more factions than a rooster has tail feathers, as Mr. Struthers once put it. But Jess found none of her fears of embarrassment real when Bill took her back the following morning. Harriet was the same imperturbable self but with this difference — she was curious as to Jess's feelings when

THANK YOU, MR. C.

alone in the woods. "You're probably the bravest girl since Joan of Arc," she said calmly.

"It's not very brave to be where you know nothing can hurt you," Jess said.

"No, but to do what you *wanted* to do. That's what I call being brave," Harriet said.

"Or very foolish," Jess added.

"I'm being brave," Bill put in. "And you can't guess how." They begged him to tell, but he shook his head. "I've made a bargain with Harriet."

"Oh, that!" Harriet said. "I'll let you off. I've made a bargain with myself. Nothing you can say about me is ever going to matter — unless it's nice. So you might as well tell us. It's probably that I'd be brave enough to go into any woods if I had enough groceries along. Is that it?"

"My life is going to be very sad from now on," Bill said. "Jess, I guess I've got to tease you."

"What else have you been doing?" Jess asked. "You brought home a bigger fish. You brought home Eddie. You brought me home when . . ." She stopped short. She had almost given herself away.

"How are those things teasing?" Harriet asked. "Didn't you want to be brought home?"

Bill glanced at Jess and the smile on his face was quite unreadable and tantalizing.

JESS

Jess flushed. "Well, it's a little humiliating, don't you think, Harriet? For a country girl to be found by a city man?"

"Did I *make* it humiliating?" Bill asked.

"Now that *is* teasing," Jess said. "You know you didn't."

"Women are so intelligible," Bill said. "Harriet, tell Jess what we've planned. I must take myself to tennis."

Getting back was as easy as that, and Harriet clinched the new era of good feeling by laying aside her passive resistance to her lessons. At noon Mrs. Wolverton looked in for a moment. Her frock brought out the blue of her eyes and her picture hat made her more entrancing than ever. "I'm so relieved, Miss Randall, that my note reached you in time. These little misunderstandings will happen. Darling," this to Harriet, "you're enchanted to have Miss Randall back. I can see it. I must rush. It is really too bad that I never see anything of my family, but I'm so delighted to leave you in good hands, and if you want the car Edmund is there. It's such a beautiful day that perhaps Miss Randall might like to see the country club at Cains Point. You could have tea on the terrace. But of course do what you like." With a charm of manner that made society people in pictures look gauche, Mrs. Wolverton included Jess in her farewell smile and departed.

THANK YOU, MR. C.

"What was it Bill asked you to tell me?" Jess inquired.

"It goes back to a club I got up in New York, the Lunch-
con Club," Harriet began.

Heaven, Jess thought, had little to add to this. Twilight, a clear green as seen through the black spires of spruce behind them, was preparing the sky for its stars. Before them the ocean, moving languorously, merged with the mystery of the dark horizon, and hummed a long-spaced slumber song on a few deep notes. The supper had been delicious in itself, but was more than a supper, because Jess had given Harriet her first lesson in native chowder and had found her pupil more than apt.

Even Bill said so. Bill's plan had been for Jess to coach Harriet on just such picnics, and his role, he had arranged, was to be that of captious critic. "Mind you," he had warned Jess, "I hate ant food. I loathe holding hot plates on one leg and slapping mosquitoes. I can't abide burning my tongue on hot cups. The very setting of a picnic brings out the worst in me. So I tell you, if you can wring one word of satisfaction from me by any messes you teach Harriet to concoct you're doing something. I agree to drive the car and swallow at least one mouthful per mess, but I reserve the right to hurt your feelings in return."

"He means it too," Harriet said.

JESS

"Of course I mean it. If I have to be sent to the hospital after one of your experiments on me, you two get the bill."

Jess knew what was behind Bill's kidding. He wanted her and Harriet to be drawn together, and they were. Even more thrilling was the companionship with him that such a party gave. Now perfection had been reached. The three of them lay on a blanket and were lazy in the midst of beauty.

"I've a question I want to ask," Jess said quietly. "And it'll break my heart if you can guess it. It's for *Information, Please.*"

"Shoot," Bill said. "I'd rather break a woman's heart than eat one more lobster."

"Oh, you!" Harriet exclaimed happily. "And they complain about girls talking! . . . What is it, Jess?"

"There are really three," Jess said. "This is the first. 'What woman in the Old Testament was so important to a young man that history would have been totally different without her, and yet you have never heard of her being thanked?'"

There was a three-breaker pause. "Whew! That's a tough one," Bill said. "I don't even see Mr. Kieran's hand up."

"I don't know anything about the Old Testament," Harriet confessed.

"What's the answer?" Bill asked.

THANK YOU, MR. C.

"I'm not going to tell you, unless you guess," Jess said. "These really are for *Information, Please*, if you think they're good enough."

"I suppose no woman ever thought she got adequately thanked," Bill remarked. "That leaves the whole field open. What's the answer? "

"I'll let you think about it," Jess said. "Here's the second. 'What woman in the Old Testament risked her life to save her cousin? ' "

"Cousin? " Bill's brow wrinkled. "Did Salome have a cousin? Or the Queen of Sheba? Was it Abraham's wife, Sarah? Ruth? "

"You know quite a few women, Bill," Jess said, looking happier with every moment of his confusion.

"Bill went to *The Green Pastures*," Harriet remarked.

"I give up the cousin," Bill said. "Who was it? "

"I'm not telling," Jess laughed. "Here's the last. 'What woman in the Old Testament had the most imagination? ' "

"Eve! " Bill came back at her instantly. "I can see her sitting in the shade of a banyan tree helping Adam name the animals, and putting in two names to Adam's one. Get the picture? Adam scratching his head, getting a bit of brain-fag as the endless procession goes by, and saying: 'Now, lookit that, Eve darling. What on earth? That one with

JESS

the horn on its nose and the leather sides! What shall we call that monstrosity?' And Eve'd say, 'That's no monstrosity, sweetheart, that's a rhinoceros.' 'Rhinoceros . . . rhinoceros,' Adam'd mull it over. 'I believe you're right, honey bunch. Rhinoceros sounds right. In fact it's quite suitable. Now how did you think of that?' And Eve would smile in that maddening way girls have when they've been lucky and want you to think it's their intelligence and say: 'Don't bother your head, dear, over how I know. I just *know*, that's all . . . '

Jess's laugh cut Bill off. "If I only had your imagination, Bill! But you'd better read your Bible. Adam got the naming all done by himself before Eve was created. However, Eve's right. Why?"

"One out of three. Not enough," Harriet said, imitating Mr. Fadiman's voice. "I'm afraid that *Information, Please* is out \$10 and one complete set of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* to Miss Jessie Randall of Maine Point, Maine."

"Bill hasn't guessed why yet," Jess objected. "That's half the question."

Bill pondered. "Come to think of it, that wasn't imagination Eve had," he said. "Just simple female curiosity. Eve was a restless young woman who lived in the most beautiful spot on earth and had everything she wanted — except apples, so she wasn't contented. She . . ."

THANK YOU, MR. C.

"Why wasn't it imagination?" Harriet broke in.
"Imagination comes before curiosity."

"Oh, no, it doesn't. Take a baby reaching out for a sun-beam. Does he imagine anything? Of course not. He's just curious to find out what that funny thing is."

"We're not discussing babies," Harriet said decidedly.
"And what they do is instinct, anyway. Don't you suppose that Jess imagines how nice it would be to have her questions accepted before she makes them up?"

"Oh, dear, I've started something!" Jess cried. "It's too nice to squabble about Eve or anybody."

"I think so, too," Harriet said, and she got to her feet.
"I'm going down to sit on that rock. It's too crowded here."

Bill laughed. "It'll be crowded on the rock when you're on it."

"Now I know why the rhinoceros grew that hide," Harriet said. "She had a brother."

Jess lay looking up at the embroidery of heaven, listening to the calm thunder of the sea as leisurely breaker followed leisurely breaker. If Maine Point could be like *this*, she would never want to leave it. But *this* meant Bill, and Bill had no ties to the village. It was merely a summer place to have a good time in and she was just a chance companion whom he would forget in five minutes after getting back to college.

JESS

This thought, which was five sixths feeling, drove a little wedge of pain into the beauty. She wondered what he was thinking. Probably of this Elaine Cromwell who was coming soon for the house party. She determined not to speak first. The least sound of impatience in his voice would kill her.

"Speaking of imagination, Jess," Bill began slowly, "where did you find yours? By sitting around with the ocean, or hobnobbing with the forest?"

"I wish I had more, Bill."

"You have enough to outfit an entire family, a village. You 'are of imagination all compact,' as Shakespeare said, or would have said if he'd had the pleasure of knowing you. Did you ever imagine yourself going to college?"

"Yes. I even asked Miss Malvinia about it and she told me how much it cost, and I gave it up. Dad does all right for here, but he doesn't make enough for that."

"Yet you don't give up trying to have your questions taken by *Information, Please*, do you?"

"No. That costs three cents."

"Why is it you're so crazy to be on that program?"

Jess hesitated. This was the one moment, if ever, that she could share her inner longings with Bill. She thanked Harriet in her heart for letting her have it. "I don't know, Bill," she said quietly. "It's something in me. I have to . . .

THANK YOU, MR. C.

When I hear these other people's names being read out, and some of them getting that wonderful encyclopedia, I just can't stand being a nobody here in Maine Point. And when I listen to *We, the People*, it's just too maddening. They come from small places, too, and they're *known*. And when they go back home, they're somebody . . . and everybody's proud of them and points them out."

"In other words they're public characters. And you have a yen to be a public character. Here in Maine Point. That it?"

"Yes . . . I guess it's very silly of me."

"I don't think it's silly at all," Bill remonstrated. He picked up a bleached stick and broke it in two, thinking. "You remind me of something I saw once. A beautiful rose. That was all there was, just a rose, a large red rose in the air. And after a week there was a stem. And in another week it reached the earth. And finally there were a lot of roots, unseen, but a lot of them, in the grubby earth. Very peculiar." He looked around and smiled slyly at her.

"Goose!" Jess exclaimed as it dawned on her that he'd seen no such thing.

"I'm not so gooselike. That's a story about you. You want to be beautifully famous. You want to be a luscious rose that people will exclaim about, on the air, without stem or roots — without a reason, that is, for being famous."

JESS

His words were like needles in the heart, they were so sharply true. Jess realized that she had spent so much time dwelling on the delight of being talked about that she'd thought precious little about earning the right.

"You've heard that old crack about the mousetrap in the woods," Bill went on. "How, if a man made a better mousetrap than anyone else, even if he lived in the depths of a wood, the public would tread a path to his door. Get it?"

Jess nodded, feeling incredibly crestfallen after being so happy. "I guess it's true, too."

"That's the beauty of it. It *is* true." Bill sat up. "All you have to do to be famous is to do something people want done and do it better than anyone else. If you do something terrifically important, like nailing the Union together, you're famous in the Lincoln way. But I suspect it works even literally for the mousetrap."

"I should never've been so silly," Jess murmured.

"I tell you you aren't silly," Bill said and there was a nice masculine roughness in his voice. "I'd want to cut my throat if I thought I'd discouraged you."

"But what can I do better than anyone else, Bill?"

"That's for you to find out. For me, too. Here I am halfway through college and I didn't even know I had to make a mousetrap until you showed me."

THANK YOU, MR. C.

" I showed you? "

Bill laughed. " Certainly, by letting me talk to you this way. Most girls wouldn't, and I'd never have been convinced if I hadn't been sure it was the truth for you. Therefore for me. You might send a bill to Dad. ' For tuition, one pleasant evening . . . \$1,000.' "

Jess was silent. " For Pete's sake, Jess, have I busted anything? "

Jess shook her head. " No. But I see now. I've got to begin all over again. "

" No, you don't! " Bill exclaimed earnestly. " You have to go right on from here, being yourself, climbing up your enthusiasm for living. That's what really makes you different, Jess, from these neighbors of yours. You're full of wanting. You're joyous with it. Go right ahead. *Get on Information, Please.* Do just that. I . . . " He stopped abruptly, as if he'd almost stepped into a hole.

" I what? " Jess prompted. " What were you going to say? "

" Sometime you're going to kill me, Jess. "

She laughed because he had become so serious.

" Promise me you won't? I may have a confession to make someday. "

" Do it now, " Jess begged, still laughing.

" No, besides it's one of those full-length confessions.



JESS

Something so dreadful that I daren't even mention it. I've said too much now."

"Oh, Bill! Now I won't have a moment's peace!"

"All the better. Then you'll know what I've been going through."

"You're serious, Bill," Jess said quietly.

"You bet I am. I . . ."

Harriet loomed out of the half-light. "I still can't think of a better name for it," she said quietly.

"For what?" both Jess and Bill asked.

"Rhinoceros."

They burst into laughter and their mood went with it. Jess put away the longing to touch Bill's forelock of hair and push it back. They got up and began to pack the things. As Bill bent over his shirt tightened over his shoulders. "If he cut me up into little bits with a pair of scissors, I'd still think him the most heavenly person on earth," Jess said to herself.

Jess faithfully pursued her diary entries. But the night before the house-party picnic was briefest of all.

"July 25

"Happy, happy, happy, happy, happy!!!! I love *him*. Yet I admire, respect, and feel affectionate toward Harriet to a *great* degree. Dad sees everything. This morning he

THANK YOU, MR. C.

asked me which I was going to miss more at the end of summer, *him* or Harriet? Imagine how absurd such a question would have been a month ago! I asked him which he could spare easier — night or day?

“Harriet is so *kind*. She wouldn’t let on to me for the world, but she is afraid my feelings may be hurt by these boys and girls on the picnic. They know I’m just the tutor. I’ve seen Elaine in the distance, and she is stunning, and *he* is a little mite stunned. But *he* is my friend, loyal, wanting the best for me. I *know* that. So I must be sensible.

“*Information, Please* acknowledged the receipt of my questions. Now if they will *only* use them!”

The clambake climaxed the Wolverton house party and Jess was making her debut into an atmosphere as novel to her as the moon’s. Wealth was something she looked at from the outside, in spite of her days at the big house. Gaiety, the high-tension gaiety of the scions of luxury, was also something exterior to her experience. Bill’s gaiety, yes, she understood that, his wisecracks and quick laughter. But she was lost in the crowd of attractive girls and good-looking boys who were strangers to her. She could not remember their names. She could not understand their jokes. Mr. Wolverton had come from New York and made a polished host on the yacht, looking very fine in his white clothes and yachting cap. Jess felt

JESS

most at home when near him. The others, she knew well, had as much interest in her, the real her, as in some sea snail at the bottom of the bay. Their manner, on the surface, was perfect, for they were the guests of Bill and Harriet and Mr. Wolverton. But Jess was sensitive and at the first realization of their indifference had withdrawn into herself.

Nature, anyhow, was her friend. The afternoon was rich with beauty. A southwest breeze raised little waves for the sun to play with. King's Cove Island offered a beach not walked on twice a year and a ridge of rock for the wind-harried conifers to cling to. Jess wondered if these laughing, chattering have-it-alls, as she named them, realized the perfection they were immersed in.

They had brought two of the Wolverton servants to do the heavy chores, the making of the fire and the cooking, much to Jess's surprise, for these were half of the fun to her mind.

"But you and I'll make the chowder," Harriet said to her. "Unless you want to play baseball. Do you?"

"Baseball out here?" Jess looked at Harriet in wonder. "You can do that anywhere. I should think they'd want to explore."

"People mostly do what they have been used to doing," Harriet said. "Mother'd die if she'd had to come along."

"Maybe I'd die in New York," Jess said. "I never thought of that."

THANK YOU, MR. C.

Harriet looked at her. "Did you think of coming to New York?"

Jess laughed. "Yes, the way you think it'd be fun to fly around the moon and see what's on the other side."

Bill came over to them. Jess saw that he was in high spirits. His party was going well. "Come on, fellows. Jess, you're on my side. Harriet, Reggie chose you."

"We're not playing," Harriet said. "We're going to do the chowder."

"The heck with the chowder. We need you."

"You'll have unequal sides if I play," Jess said.

"Unequal nothing! I'm equal to any two players," Bill grinned. Reggie came over and dragged Harriet away. "Want me to drag you like that, Jess?" Bill asked.

Jess did. She wanted that above everything. But she couldn't say so. "You've got even sides now, Bill," she said. "And I want to start the chowder. Maine's giving this party and it must be perfect."

"You really do?" Bill asked, wavering. Calls from the others to hurry decided him. "O.K. This is the land of the free and the brave."

Jess saw sand spurt from his departing feet and wished herself at home. Why was she so contrary? Why had she just said no to Bill and her own desires? Now the separation between herself and the scions was no longer hidden but

JESS

admitted. She belonged with the cooks, of her own choosing. Slowly, bitterly revealed to herself, she walked toward the cook fire.

The supper had been eaten. At the call for it the game had stopped and the players had trooped to the place where the cloths and dishes had been laid out on the white sand. As if by some natural selection they had sat down in twos and fours and been served, and the laughter had crackled from group to group while twilight, unobserved, deepened from beauty to beauty.

Bill, as Jess noted, had sat Elaine with her back to a rock and served her and sat down then beside her. Reggie had led Harriet to his brother, who was sitting by an attractive girl, and threatened to tie her hands and feed her if she moved. The others, either old friends or made momentarily close by the days and nights of the house party, joked and ate and exchanged proprietary glances, carefree as young gods and goddesses, and Jess ached with a loneliness she had never felt before.

"Now, young lady, it is time you were having something to eat," Mr. Wolverton said to her. "Won't you sit down?"

Jess gratefully sat beside him.

THANK YOU, MR. C.

"Mrs. Wolverton and I are very grateful for all that you've done for Harriet this summer, Miss Randall."

"I feel as if you should say that backward, Mr. Wolverton." Jess smiled. "Father does, too. He says that the tutoring has really been the other way."

"How does he arrive at that?" Mr. Wolverton was amused.

"He says that Harriet has given me lessons in modesty, from 10 to 11; in reserve, from 11 to noon; and in the technique of being sensibly lazy, from noon on."

Mr. Wolverton laughed. "The lazy part I can admit," he said.

"I took Dad up on that, too," Jess told him. "I said that I wished he'd praise laziness to Miss Malvinia — she's my history teacher — who thinks laziness is a species of disease, a kind of grief. And Dad put me right. 'I said *sensibly* lazy, daughter. Like a tree, you know. Growing all the time, soaking up what's good for it, and never wasting a moment. Would you respect a tree that went darting all over the place like a dragonfly? Give me a child, like Harriet, that broods a little and has silences in her. Most girls and boys live like pin wheels, it seems to me. They go off in sparks. Very gay and pretty while they last, no doubt, but how long do they last?'"

JESS

"Your father is a very discerning man, Miss Randall." Mr. Wolverton chuckled. "I'm inclined to agree with him."

"Mother didn't," Jess went on, for some of her spirits had come back at having Bill's father so attentive. "'What notions are you putting into Jessie's head?' she told Father. 'You know you like Harriet because she never interrupts you.' 'Which is not a bad trait at that,' Dad said, because he really does like to talk — he's a lawyer, Mr. Wolverton. But so does Mother. 'Just the same, I see no sense in undoing everything that we send Jess to school to learn. Laziness!' and Mother sniffed. 'As if anybody had to be taught that! You'll be suggesting that they offer prizes for disobedience next!' 'Well, I might,' and Dad winked at me. 'Carefully selected disobedience, anyway.' You see, Mr. Wolverton, Dad loves to tease Mother, but they seem fonder of each other than most girls' mothers and fathers in the village."

Mr. Wolverton laughed heartily over this conversation and Jess felt a glow of pleasure at being able to entertain him. Being host, however, he excused himself and joined another group, and the loneliness closed in on Jess again. Bill was helping Elaine to her feet and they started up the beach.

"Hi, there, where are you two going?" someone called.

"This silly duck has never seen the moon rise. I'm going to explain it to her," Bill called.

"Bill says he's afraid of the dark," Elaine called back.

"He'd better be!" Reggie yelled after them, and the others laughed.

Someone started singing "Ole Man River" and the rest joined in. Jess, a little apart, sang, too, but in the background of her feeling ran the words of a song she had once made up:

Over all the waters,
Over all the sea,
A myriad stars are shining;
There is no star for me.

An evening star for lovers,
A morning star for friends;
Oh, must I look in vain for mine
Until the star time ends?

She had forgotten that sad little song, for it was not in her nature to be despondent long. But now it rubbed against her memory like a ghostly black cat, and she felt it was all too true. And she hated herself for feeling sorry for herself when it was mostly her fault. She *wasn't* like this. She *wouldn't* be like this.

The singers changed to a tune she loved, "Ise Got Plenty o' Nuthin'" and she joined in, humming since she did not know the words, and thinking, I've got plenty of everything

JESS

and I'm going to stop being so silly. Already she felt better and sang the old familiar songs which the party soon drifted into. When her thought wandered up the beach, picturing Bill sitting with Elaine and saying to her the things she longed to hear, Jess dragged it back. And presently Mr. Wolverton said that it was necessary to go to catch the tide, and Bill came back with Elaine, warding off the jokes the rest threw at him, and when the boat pitched and stumbled in the small swell and there was talk of seasickness, she felt her comfortable superiority coming back to her.

The blow fell at the wharf. The party had left half a dozen cars parked there, and there was a scramble, the boys seeing to it that their girls of the evening were getting into the right ones. Headlights came on, motors began whirring. Reggie with a hand under Harriet's arm was carrying her off. "Will you come up to the house, Jess?" Harriet called, but Jess felt that she was not expected to and said: "No, thanks, Harriet. It's getting late." "I'll phone you when I get back, Jess. Bill and I are going to Bar Harbor for a few days. Thanks so much for coming with us tonight."

Jess was startled, disappointed. She had hoped that on the leaving of the guests on the morrow she and Bill and Harriet could settle back into the happy routine of recent weeks. And now Bill was going away and had said nothing to her. She turned to say good-by to Mr. Wolverton and ran

THANK YOU, MR. C.

into Bill's runabout. Elaine was sitting beside him. "Hop in, Jess, and we'll run you home," he said, but to Jess's over-sensitive ear he sounded a little less than eager for her company.

"It's just a step, Bill, thanks," she said.

"Oh, come along . . . Save the step."

"Really, Bill, I don't . . ."

Elaine's smooth casual tones broke in: "Don't coerce the girl, Bill. I don't think she likes us."

At that instant another car threatened Bill's fender and he shouted and Jess's chance to accept gracefully was gone.

"Good-by, Bill. Thanks for the wonderful evening," Jess said and stepped away, only to find another car cutting off her escape. Her face was hot with Elaine's remark, so casual and possessive, whether meant to be cruel or not, and suddenly she heard Elaine laugh and say: "So *that's* the girl! Your Patricia! Why didn't you tell me?" And again the laugh and Bill saying, "*Sb-sh!*" and Elaine saying: "Oh, how perfect! My rival who makes love to you in a diary! Miss Pots and Pans making passes at you on paper! Billy, it'll kill me! How does it go? '*He* is my North Star, steady and bright and wonderful, oh, but so many millions of miles away. . . . Why can't I say these things to *him*? Why can't *he* know? . . . Maybe you have to be very, very fond of a person to tease him. . . . Him, him, him. . . . He!

JESS

He! He! ' Billy, it's absolutely the most killingly funny . . . " Shut up, Goose-puss! " Then Elaine's laugh cutting through Bill's voice, and the car going into gear and shooting ahead.

Jess stood, shattered, her world sliced in two by that cruel, lighthearted laugh and those crueller words. " Your Patricia! " "*He* is my North Star." Her secrets! Her very soul! How did this girl know them? How could she know them if Bill hadn't told her? How had *he* known? In all her confidences to him, she had never given herself so completely away . . . Yes, she'd mentioned Patricia under his promise of absolute secrecy. Bill was clever, but he could not have guessed the rest. And now Elaine was making fun of her. That was bad enough. But to know that Bill had told her, so that they could have a good laugh together . . . that was unbearable!

Jess realized that the last car had gone. She stood there in an agony of clear seeing. The dream of dreams was over. The most wonderful boy in the world was sawdust, a traitor, a cheap deceiver. He had spied on her inmost feelings and then betrayed them to a pretty girl with lots of money and a way with her of making Bill feel important.

Jess's fingernails hurt her palms as the torture grew. Another thing that Harriet had said swam into Jess's mind. It was at that first lunch when Jess had laughingly called Bill

THANK YOU, MR. C.

dreadful. And Harriet had said: "You don't really mean that. . . . But you will someday. See if you don't." Harriet had looked full of hatred when she said it. Now it had come true.

Jess felt the sobs coming. She sank down on the floor of the wharf, her head on the log at the edge, and the fullness of pain racked her body.

THE DUEL

9



STORMS take time but no storm storms on forever, and Jess, wept out and weary, sat up and looked around her. It must be very late, she realized. The tide was much higher, and a cold fog was drifting in. She rose and started home. It was good to be walking. The damp smells from the barnacled pier posts reminded her that some of the familiar world remained.

Her room was a refuge. Thank goodness her parents had not sat up for her. She undressed, thinking, thinking. What to do next? How to live so that everybody would not guess? That was the important thing. To hide it, to give nobody a chance to say: "What's happened to Jess? She doesn't look too perky lately. You don't suppose it's that Wolverton boy, do you? That's what she gets running with that crowd. I always said it'd happen."

No, she would give nobody a chance to talk. But she never wanted to see Bill again. No, no, never again . . . At the thought, her mouth drew down, and she turned her face into the pillow, crying bitterly again.

THE DUEL

"Harriet phoned." Mrs. Randall carried in the breakfast bacon.

"When, Mother?"

"About ten. She wanted to thank you for adding so much to the party and to say good-by."

"And where were you?" Mr. Randall asked, looking curiously at Jess. "I stayed up till eleven and concluded you'd run off with one of the millionaires."

"Elbert! Don't put such nonsense in Jessie's head," Mrs. Randall exclaimed, "and please put down that paper."

"Nonsense? We could have a new house with forty rooms, and a six-car garage, and a private yacht . . ."

"Elbert, what *has* got into you? When I have a house with forty rooms, you can stay home and do the cleaning."

"With fifteen servants? Oh, no! I shall spend the day telephoning around the county to find where you are." Mr. Randall was watching Jess closely. "That must've been an exhausting picnic. You usually favor my wit with a smile, daughter."

"When it is wit," Jess said.

"I agree with you, Jessie," Mrs. Randall said. "I see nothing funny in such remarks. Did you have a good time, dear?"

"Yes, Mother." Jess tried to put conviction into her words.

JESS

"It was a beautiful hanging," Mr. Randall said. "Life was extinct in six minutes. The body was . . ."

"*Elbert!* I won't sit at the table with you, if you intend to go on like this. And Sunday morning, too!"

"I was just imitating Jess's enthusiasm, my love."

"Jessie is tired. Picnics always tired me. And especially when you know so few people on them."

"Did Harriet say anything else, Mother?" Jess asked.

"No, I said that you would call her up."

"Thanks, Mother." Jess had no intention of calling her.

"Edgar Allan Poe would have liked breakfasts like this," Mr. Randall said. "All mirth and jollity and very pleasant until you realize that everybody is a ghost. Another cup of coffee, please."

Mrs. Randall ignored this and said: "The way the fog's burning off, it looks as if it's going to be hot. Jessie, what are you going to wear to church?"

"Crape," Mr. Randall remarked. "Picnic crape trimmed with cemetery velvet."

"I declare, Elbert!" Mrs. Randall exclaimed. "What pleasure do you get in plaguing the girl?"

"He's not plaguing me, Mother," Jess said. "Let him rave on."

"For that I won't say another word," Mr. Randall said.

"That's a mercy anyway," Mrs. Randall remarked and

THE DUEL

the meal was finished with Mrs. Randall doing all the talking. After the dishes were washed, Jess went up to her room. She had stood that ordeal anyway. It was funny that her father, who always took her side, who was usually so observant and tactful, had tried to tease her. She looked in the mirror. There were no signs of grief. She was neither thinner nor with less color. But her father had nearly hit the nail on the head with his mention of ghosts. That was what she felt like — a shell, an emptiness. Ghosts were lucky; they could be invisible and didn't have to answer questions.

This was a time when she usually wrote in her diary. She never wanted to open it again. Just something more for people to make fun of. She opened her desk drawer to put her pen away. That was over, too. A page she had torn out of a magazine caught her eye. It was from a movie magazine. She'd been attracted by the picture of Gary Cooper. Some woman was interviewing him, asking him what, in his considered opinion, was the most essential quality for success in Hollywood. Jess remembered how she had thrilled at reading his reply:

Courage. The ability to take it. To take it again and again, because giving up means going back on yourself and all you thought you were. It's the same thing that brings you back to the ranch house through a blizzard when everything in you cries out to stop struggling. It's the thing that

JESS

keeps you working over a drowned person when everyone else says he's dead. You may be a fool. You mayn't succeed after all, not in that line. For brains count, too, and you've got to think a proposition through. But if you haven't got the courage to stick to it, at the difficult moment that always comes, sooner or later, then success is not for you *in anything*.

Jess felt a stirring of the old thrill again. She could hear Gary Cooper's fine, steady, sincere voice saying those words. She could remember . . . remember . . .

She went to the closet and got her diary. That was *one* thing nobody could make her give up.

It had indeed been hot and now a thunderstorm was sending brooding far-off rumbles through the still foliage. Jess stopped writing. She had recorded pagefuls before church, after church, after the dinner dishes. Not one fact had been obliterated. Bill was gone, dead; worse than dead, for he would be so much alive for others on and on, year after year. When the stomach-dropping truth hit her, after a short spell of forgetting it, she felt sick all over again. But something — Gary Cooper, or her true self, or her persistent progress of revelation, page after page — had righted her again. Now she welcomed the coming storm. She loved the excitement of boiling clouds arching above the blue-black. Lightning made

THE DUEL

her tingle but it didn't scare her — not much, not so that others could see.

She went downstairs and out on the porch. The elms along the shore road were beginning to stream in the wind. A spiral of dust whirled quickly higher and higher and twisted off across the field. It grew suddenly several shades darker as if another curtain had been pulled down. A column of thunder tumbled to earth.

"Did you put the windows down, Jessie?" Mrs. Randall asked.

"Yes, Mother."

"You'll be useful in heaven," Mr. Randall told his wife. "The angels won't have to think of a thing."

"I know how much new matting costs, anyway," Mrs. Randall sniffed.

Jess laughed and held out a paper to her father. "Look, Dad, I've done a song."

Mr. Randall took the paper and read aloud:

SEA SONG

The sun shines over the burning water,
Johnny come back, come home again.
The sea is empty far away,
Johnny come home.

JESS

The moon lies silver on the water,
Johnny come back, come home again.
The sea is empty far away,
Johnny come home.

But Johnny will not come by moonlight,
He will not come on a sunny sea;
Johnny's time for coming is over.
And that's as it should be.

"Why, Jess!" Mr. Randall stopped, for all the meaning of his daughter's quietness and that hurt look in her eyes was suddenly plain to him. "Why that . . . that's beautiful!"

"Do you think so, Dad?"

"Isn't it a little sad, dear?" Mrs. Randall asked.

A heavy rumble of thunder diverted any need for answer. Mrs. Randall got up and said: "I'm going in. You can sit here and be struck if you like."

"I think we will," Mr. Randall said. Then he added quietly to Jess: "Nothing is ever so bad as it seems, Jess. Remember that."

For an instant Jess wanted to tell him everything, but she had determined, promised herself, to keep this hurt to herself. So she said: "Yes, Dad . . . Do you mind if I don't stay out?"

"No. I'll be in in a minute. Jess . . ."

THE DUEL

"Yes?"

"I guess I was pretty dumb at breakfast."

"No, you weren't, Dad. You were just right. I've put away the picnic crape . . . with the cemetery trimmings. Thanks, Dad." The screen door banged behind her.

Mr. Randall stood for a minute. He wanted to punch Johnny in the face, a good one.

Providence sees to it that the good do not have too heavy a load to carry. The stars were out on more than one night of the ensuing week before Jess returned over the fields from Mrs. Briggs's. Jess knew that the busier one was, the less one thought of personal matters. Also she had found out that when one is helping others, this busyness is twice as effective. On Monday morning, after the storm, she had started to the phone to ask if she could help Mrs. Briggs when the bell rang and there was Eddie.

Eddie had avoided Jess since the rise and decline of his rocket fame. He knew that he had been mean about the fish. And meanness usually skirts around those it hurts, to its own greater hurt, so Eddie had been cut off from Jess's ideas and laughter. Now, as he stood at the door, he barely looked up at Jess. He fingered his Scout hat and said: "Mom was wonderin' if you could lend her a hand. She's awful busy and feelin' poorly. Just for today she means."

JESS

"I was going to phone her, Eddie, this very minute. Wait till I shut Noah in the cellar, and I'll be with you."

"Who's Noah?" Eddie asked.

"Don't you know the Bible?" Jess was already back in her teasing mood.

"Oh, *that* Noah! You haven't got him, anyways."

Jess laughed. "No, Eddie. Noah was already six hundred years old when he built his ark. We haven't got him, and we wouldn't put him in the cellar, if we had. This Noah's my cat and the very idea of a rat excites him. Dad thought he heard a rat down cellar." She left him with her hound.

"How does Noah and Jason make out together?" Eddie asked when they had started.

"Like you and me, Eddie," and Jess smiled. "They argue but don't get as far as personal assault. Noah looked as though he'd swap Jason for a dead mouse, but Jason convinced Noah somehow that he simply wasn't interested in anything Noah thought, felt, planned to do, or did, and so they can share the kitchen on wet days without much back talk. Jason seemed to know that Noah was here first and he's not a rambunctious dog, anyway. They're fun to watch."

"Just like tourists," Eddie said. "Tourists is more fun to watch than a circus."

"How so?"

THE DUEL

"The way they do. Some of 'em thinks they bought you with their dollar. Some of 'em acts like you was part of the scenery. And some is really nuts."

Jess laughed. "But there are some nice ones."

"Oh, sure."

Mrs. Briggs welcomed Jess as a drought-stricken farmer welcomes rain. "I told Eddie not to bother you if you was busy, Jessie. I tried all round, though, and Sadie Andrews was puttin' up berries today, and Mrs. Weeson's got a sick boy, and Nora Tramley has folks."

"It just happened right," Jess said. "I'm not doing anything for a whole week and I'll come every day. And any other time, Mrs. Briggs. I know what trouble is."

Mrs. Briggs looked at her quickly. "You do? You always act like you hadn't a care in the world, and that's the way you should, too. It makes people feel good to see you."

So Jess plunged in, and her diary gained, although she was too tired at night to make long entries, for, as Eddie had said, tourists were more fun than a circus — if you took them that way. The fussy ones you made a game of, and all of them were nice, if you found the right key to their natures. Some of them didn't know they had a key until you found it for them. Jess had a rich week, although she would not accept a cent, and her dread of the coming Monday, when she returned to Harriet and probably Bill, stayed in her mind.

JESS

Sunday, though, was hard. The pain in her heart woke. She could not close her mental eye to the pictures of Bill — Bill on that wonderful afternoon when they had fished together, Bill on the picnic with Elaine, Bill the forever-lost. There was no thunderstorm to divert her on this Sunday afternoon. She went to her room and read over Gary Cooper's talk on courage. There was always her diary:

“August 3

“I guess you've got to be a fisherman, Miss Randall. You've got to feel sure you know how, then find the best stream, then try your hardest, and if you don't land anything that's the luck of the day, and you've had fun anyway. Tomorrow's going to be hard, but I'm going to take it just like a day on Alder Brook. Gary Cooper says that courage is the one thing to have. The trouble is it's so *lonely* just to go around being courageous inside you, never letting on the pain's there, never asking anyone to give you a lift with it. With *him* I could have stood anything, but now I've got to stand it with *him* outside. I've got to have lunch with Harriet at one end of the table and *him* at the other and me being courageous and talking and laughing like that Spartan boy who held the fox under his shirt and who never let on the fox was eating into his heart. He had courage, I'll say, and he dropped dead of it. The trouble is I won't drop dead. I'll

THE DUEL

go on and *he'll* get into the car and go off for golf leaving me behind.

“ Well, I've got to remember my song, which is *true*:

‘ Johnny’s time for coming is over.

And *that’s* as it should be.’

It is, and I've got to face it, and I *will*.

“ Mr. Meekom preached this morning on ‘ The kingdom of God is within you.’ I don’t believe he believes it, or he wouldn’t look so sober and worried. But I believe Jesus Christ believed it, for he never said anything that wasn’t true. And if it’s true then I’ve got the Kingdom of heaven inside me at this moment. I’m carrying heaven around. If I *really* believed that I’d act as though I did. I’d be the happiest girl on earth. The light from it would shine through me and people’d say: ‘ My goodness, Jess is happy! You might suppose she had everything. It’s fun to be with her.’ Why even *he* might feel that and change . . . ”

Jess stopped writing, for a strange thrill had run through her. Here was a ray of hope. She *had* the Kingdom of God within her. Christ said so. Then why not start this minute feeling and acting as if, *really* as if, it was so. Suppose she had the biggest diamond in the world. Suppose she wore it

JESS

on an unbreakable chain around her neck, under her dress. It would make her feel wonderful. She could feel it against her skin and not another soul would know it was there, yet she'd know, and it'd give her confidence, and when she shared the news with *him*, his eyes would light up and he'd say, "Jess, you're the luckiest girl in the world." Well, the Kingdom of heaven was a million times more valuable and exciting and worth while than a diamond, and she *had* it, she *actually* did have it. Christ said so.

Jess picked up her pen and her hand was trembling. She wrote:

"Perhaps this is the most blessed day of my life, and I thought it was the most miserable! It's true and I'm going to live it. To think I was eating my heart out only a while ago because I wasn't famous and talked of. And here I have the Kingdom of heaven within me. And so does everybody else, but I'm going to *know* it. I'm not going to give in to this sadness, because it doesn't go with heaven. I'm going to start right now, from the skin out. I'm going to take a bath and dress in my nicest dress, the new one, and when I go downstairs, I'm taking heaven with me. So good-by, old silly, blind child. From now on it's new Jess writing, thanks to *him*, thanks to Mr. Meekom, thanks to Jesus Christ."

THE DUEL

Jess pushed her chair back and rose. There was a lightness, an elation in her, that she hadn't felt for weeks. Fear had gone. She ran a tepid bath and dressed in the frock she had sent away for, an exquisite blue, the pale blue of a gentian that has grown in the shadow of a pine. Her father and mother were on the porch.

"Jumping juniper!" Mr. Randall exclaimed. "A vision! Where have you been all these years? Mother, a princess!"

"Do you like it?" Jess asked.

"Of all the fool things to say!" Mr. Randall ejaculated, beaming.

"It looks very well, dear," Mrs. Randall said. "Turn around."

"What've you got in your eyes?" Jess's father asked. "What's got into you anyway?"

"Don't be silly," Mrs. Randall remarked. "Jessie's been planning on this dress for weeks. It is really very becoming, dear. Why did you put it on this afternoon, especially? I thought you'd save it."

"I'm glad you didn't, Jess. People are always saving things. They save dessert to the end of the meal. They save the nice remarks about you until the day of the funeral. They save their best clothes for a party when you don't need to be

JESS

cheered up. They save their children to give to some stranger. It's a crazy world."

"You do your best to make it crazier, I must say, Elbert," Mrs. Randall observed. "What do you think of the length of the skirt, Jessie?"

"Look, we have a visitor," interrupted Mr. Randall. "Jess, you vixen! I thought you were dressing up for us and now . . ."

Jess watched him get out of the blue roadster, watched the familiar shoulders turn, the handsome, hatless head look up, the smile that could do things to her like music appear fleetingly on his face and vanish. He opened the gate and came up the walk, and she still stood there, a statue, a strange tense statue of feeling marble. Once more the smile, as his foot touched the step, and she noted the suspense in it, and thought, "It's true . . . What I feared is true."

Bill was on the porch saying, "Is anybody at home?" but he was looking solely at Jess.

Mr. Randall had waited for her to speak, then he said: "Glad to see you back, Bill. Jess has been studying telepathy. She's just put on her best dress as a result."

"Oh, Father, I haven't!" Jess exclaimed. "Will you sit down, Bill?"

Bill spoke to Mrs. Randall and said: "Telepathy must be clever. I hardly knew I was coming myself. Cort Rodgers

THE DUEL

flew me down to pack and is going to fly me back. His father's going to take us on a cruise, down around Nova Scotia and to the islands in the Saint Lawrence."

"What a dull life you lead, Bill!" Mr. Randall said.

Jess had hardly taken her eyes from his face, healthy as life itself and yet under some strain. "The Kingdom of heaven is within," she kept saying mentally. "The Kingdom of heaven is within. It's mine. I must live as if . . . as if . . ." The struggle between mind and eye was almost too much. She wanted to run away, into the house.

"Could you go for a run in the car, Jess?" Bill asked.

"I . . . didn't you say Mr. Rodgers was waiting, Bill?" Ordinarily her heart would have leaped at the thought, but now . . .

"I wish you would, Jess."

"Of course she will, Bill," Mrs. Randall broke in, making Jess feel seven years old.

"Now, Mother!" Mr. Randall corrected. "Dress like a princess, act like a princess. Keep your suitors on edge."

"Dad! Don't be silly," Jess said. "I'd be glad to, Bill."

She sat beside him in the low comfy seat. "This is a great surprise, Bill."

He swung the car into the shore road and then said, "What's happened to you in the week, Jess?"

JESS

"What do you mean? I've been working over at Mrs. Briggs's."

"You know I don't mean that. I leave a pal and come back to a stranger. You might be on the Pacific Coast at the moment."

"The Kingdom of heaven is within," Jess said to herself, "and I'm spoiling it with clouds. I mustn't be like this." Aloud, "Bill, why did you come just now?" she asked, as nearly her old self as she could accomplish.

"To see you. To say good-by. The cruise'll take three or four weeks."

"No, you have something on your mind, Bill."

"Maybe you have been studying mind reading," the boy said. "I . . . Do you remember I told you I had a confession to make?"

Jess nodded. Now it was coming. Where had that buoyant joy of an hour before vanished to?

Bill turned off the road and stopped with the car pointing seaward, giving them a view of blue bay and green islets and calm sky veined with mare's-tails floating miles above all earthly things. "After the confession you may want to get home and away from me as soon as possible."

Jess's fingers were digging into her palms but she said, "It'd better be a good one, after keeping me waiting this long."

THE DUEL Presb. Board of Foreign Missions

"It's a bad one, if that's what you mean by a good one," Bill said. "It's been wearing me down, ever since that day you lost yourself on purpose, Jess. You acted a lie, and I acted another. I let you think it was Jason that led me to you."

Jess was surprised. So it wasn't about Elaine! "That seems like some time you've read about in history, Bill. It doesn't matter much, does it?"

"A lot. Didn't you ever wonder how that stupid hound could be so clever?"

"Not much. I supposed you'd let him hunt on the Nameless Pond side of Alder Brook and he was lucky in picking up the trail. Anyway, we agreed to let the thing rest."

"That was my cleverness," Bill said. "I suggested that agreement because I didn't want you asking questions which'd make me lie with my lips."

"But what's so important about it now?" Jess had a let-down feeling.

"And *still* you don't ask me how I found you."

"All right," Jess said tonelessly. "How did you?"

"I went down to your house that night, you remember, and found your family stewing. I saw Jason lying on the porch and that put the idea into my head of saying I could find you with him to help, and that I'd be down early in the morning in case you didn't turn up. Well, when I went

JESS

down nobody was home. Your mother had gone in next door, as it turned out. I knew I had to get some article of your clothing for Jason to smell and took the liberty of hiking up to your room, and while I was rooting around in your closet for an old shoe, or something, I unearthed that diary you'd hidden."

"My diary?" All the surprise Bill could have expected sounded in those two words. "*Bill!*"

"It's unforgivable, I know, but you haven't heard anything yet." Bill glanced at Jess. Her face was crowded with thinking and emotion. "I looked into it. Just plain nosiness. Or no, a little better than that, Jess. I'd always been curious about you . . . you were so different from the other girls I'd met here . . . Well, I soon was too interested to stop. You can't blame me for that, what with all the stuff about me. I read on and on and came to where you said you were going to get lost, for publicity's sweet sake, and spend the first night at Nameless. I wanted to let out a whoop at that, for I knew you were as good as found. Only I had too guilty a conscience by then to do any whooping. I had an impulse to tell your people, phone your Dad. But I didn't do that. I thought I'd save it and get the credit, and anyway I was ashamed to tell how I knew. Pretty small on the whole, don't you think?"

Jess was speechless, racked with feeling. So Bill knew!

THE DUEL

And after knowing, he could go off with Elaine . . .

"Go on, spit it out. I deserve it," Bill said.

"I wasn't thinking about that," Jess said.

"Well, you will. You haven't heard the half of it. Jess, I was crazy about it, about what you'd written. It was so *you*, so entirely your rich, crazy, wonderful self! All your disappointments that I'd never guessed. And your enthusiasm. That's a word I learned at college, enthusiasm. Do you know what it means?"

Jess shook her head. He had called her wonderful.

"It means 'God in us.' Isn't that great? Now let me wallow some more. I had my little camera with me, you know, the good one. I couldn't bear to be caught reading by your mother. So I propped the notebook up and photographed a lot of pages. I used up my films on it. That's why I couldn't take a picture of Nameless when you asked me. I had to lie to you again. One lie seems to breed others, like maggots in cheese. I developed the films and enlarged them, and now I'm coming to the awful part, the cream of this confession."

"Bill!" Jess gasped. It didn't seem as if there could be any more.

"The oftener I read those pages, Jess, the finer they seemed. They were so *real*. I was seeing into your very self. I was sympathizing with what you wanted. It was like an exciting

JESS

book, but better than any book because it was *true*. I wanted like everything to show it to Harriet, but I was afraid she'd tell. I wanted . . . a lot of things. I thought of Elaine Cromwell's father. I'd just been staying with them, you know. He's a publisher, a big one, Cromwell, Adamson & Co., you know. And then I got a big idea. Why not show them to him and get his opinion? So I sent him the enlargements, registered mail, telling him they were secret and confidential. And then, because I've got a scheming mind, I thought of Elaine. I thought I'd give her a play, soften her up, you know, so that she could train those eyes of hers on her pappy and say, 'Dad, you've just got to take that diary.' "

"Bill, you didn't! "

"That, for a change, is the truth, Jess."

"Harriet said you were crazy about Elaine, so I guess it wasn't hard."

"Harriet said that when she was mad at me and wanted to hurt me through you. Elaine is a beautiful bunch of spinach, far as I'm concerned. You could hide her brains under your little fingernail. I was certainly scared pink on the picnic. Mr. Cromwell had left those diary pages lying around and she'd read a bit. That's article 67 of the confession. Luckily she didn't connect you with them until just at the end. I could've spanked her when she started laughing at you being Patricia."

THE DUEL

Jess's head was whirling. Things were coming too fast.

Bill went on. "I saw Mr. Cromwell last night and he said he was impressed by those pages and would like to see the whole thing. He said he thought it'd make the grade if the rest was as good as what he saw. How much more have you?"

"You mean they'd want to make a *book* of my diary?" Jess exclaimed.

"That's it. Printed pages, between covers, and your name on the title page. Would you like that?"

"It's too impossible, too wonderful!" Then Jess's joy died away. "But it's just a dream, Bill. Think of what I've said about Miss Malvinia and Miss Tottem and Eddie and even Mother and Dad, *and* myself. It couldn't be done."

"We thought of that," Bill said aduly. "Other names would have to be used. But that'd be easy, and it wouldn't change the humanity of it, or anything. It wouldn't spoil *you*. You'd be willing, wouldn't you, Jess?"

"Willing? I'd die of pride and pleasure."

"Well, don't die in advance. It's not a sure thing yet. They have to see it and take it up in conference and all that sort of thing . . . Jess, am I forgiven?"

"Bill, you know . . ." and Jess found it sweet to say this. "Bill, nothing you *ever* do has to be forgiven."

His hand stole over hers and squeezed it. "Sweet girl,"

JESS

he murmured. " Jess, I feel as if they'd lifted the Pyramids off my chest. Why, I'm breathing! Remarkable! "

All of his old buoyancy was back in his voice.

" I'm too happy to breathe," she whispered.

" Don't count on it too much, Jess."

She shook her head. He didn't know why she was happy. The book helped, of course. But she could realize that, later. At present it was enough to sit there beside him, to know about Elaine, to be thankful, *thankful*, that she had found the secret of happiness before these blessed things happened. The sky was beautiful with its scrolls of cirrus, and the sea need not seem empty ever again.

RE-ENTER EDDIE

Received from
READER'S SERVICE
Presb. Board of Foreign Missions

10



OCTOBER had never been more beautiful, Jess thought. September had been fine enough, with satisfying days in Harriet's company, and exciting days, though just a handful of them, between Bill's return from the cruise and his leaving for home.

October, though, had a new quality of excitement, suspense that almost hurt at times. For Mr. Cromwell's publishing house had 235 pages of her diary and were considering it. They'd been considering it for weeks, and any time now Jess expected to hear.

Having so explosive a secret was gorgeous fun, even if a little wearing. Jess remembered the day last spring when she had walked down to mail the prize-competition letter. That secret had been fun, too, but she had known all along — so she realized now — that her hopes had been founded on just hope. Even when the winners had been announced and the \$25,000 had gone to a woman in Iowa, whose con-

JESS

tribution was no more original than another piece of soap, Jess had felt only a momentary disappointment. But now she had performance to stand on. The diary was real. Bill's enthusiasm for it was genuine. Mr. Cromwell's words had weight. In an imaginative girl like Jess, pictures were forever forming. She pictured herself walking up to Miss Malvinia and holding out the printed volume to her with, "I wanted you to have a copy of my first book, Miss Malvinia."

"Yours? Did *you* write this?"

"There's my name on the jacket."

"But Jessie Randall! I'm overcome! Why this is marvelous . . ." She would be skimming down the pages.

"Why, you're a *genius*!"

Very, very pleasant, coming from one who considered her flighty. Then Jess's mind skipped to Miss Tottem. "I have a surprise for you, Miss Tottem." Holding the book behind her back.

"Mercy, I hope not!" severely.

"It isn't tree toads this time. Guess."

"I haven't any time to guess, child. Now run along."

Child! So she would bring out the treasure in its green jacket — Jess visualized the book in a lovely green, jack-in-the-pulpit green — and Miss Tottem would stare unbelievably and say: "To think all this time you were writing this! Jessie, can you forgive me? I'm stupid, blind. But now

RE-ENTER EDDIE

. . . Oh, we're proud of you, Jessie. All Maine Point will be proud."

Jess's impatient progress left Miss Tottem to her stupefaction and hurried to Miss Simpson who forgot to say "I expect so" and offered to fill her windows with the book. Then on to Josiah Struthers at the post office. He could only blink. And so to everyone, then back to the schoolroom. Of course the real glory would be there. She could see Eddie Briggs's eyes bulging, could hear his awed voice say: "Gee, Jess, . . . I'm sorry about that fish. Gee! Wait till Minnie Treadwell sees this. Won't she be sore?"

There was nothing an imagination couldn't do for one, if it had something to go on. Some evenings, though, Jess was frightened clear through. Suppose she got a thin little letter from Cromwell, Adamson & Co. saying:

"Dear Miss Randall,

"We have read your diary and find it not quite suited to our needs.

"Thanking you for submitting it, we remain,

"Very truly yours . . ."

That would finish her.

Fortunately Jess was busy. The late touring season was holding up and Mrs. Briggs's summer helper had gone. So Jess went over to give her a hand when needed. It was an easy

JESS

way of earning 50 cents and Eddie's mother was grateful. "There's nobody else I can count on like you, Jessie," she would say. "You're a person of your word. And you always make such a good impression, too."

Jess had found it singularly easy to make a good impression. City people were so friendly! So different from Maine Point's view of them! City people, strangers though they were, began, in matters of sociability, where the natives of Maine Point left off after years of acquaintance. "Do come to see us when you're in Boston, Miss Randall!" That sort of thing. It made Jess feel as if she were living in a world instead of a pocket. Also it took her mind from the letter that didn't come.

Then there it was. Mr. Struthers handed it to her without giving any sign that the world had ceased to turn. Jess turned away to open it, for it was very thin and she felt a new kind of faintness. She read:

Dear Miss Randall,

We have read the diary which you have submitted through Mr. William G. Wolverton and are glad to be able to tell you that we wish to publish it. We regret to say, however, that we believe it would be inadvisable to publish it over your own name for reasons which will readily occur to you.

Should you be willing to have us bring the book out over a *nom de plume*, we will forward the contract to you at once.

RE-ENTER EDDIE

Kindly wire us your decision at your earliest convenience as we would like to catch the Christmas sale and the time is very short.

We remain,

Very truly yours,

Frederick C. G. Adamson.

Jess looked up from the letter a different person. The unbelievable had happened. She was to have a book, *her* book, published, put on sale, read from Portland, Maine, to Portland, Oregon. And nobody would know that it was her book after all. She felt as if she had been shown heaven and then stabbed at the gate.

The Government does not furnish chairs in its post offices. Jess had to sit down. She was trembling. Leaving the small unpainted cubbyhole, that still could be such a glory hole, she went outdoors. Through the wind-stripped maples she saw the Great Dipper wheeling in its timeless circle just as usual. Jess wanted to laugh and cry. "I get more than I could ever have dreamed of last spring, and I want to sit down and bawl," she said to herself. Her book under another name! When she handed it to Miss Malvinia with "By Jennie Smith" or "By Mary Martin" on the jacket it would mean nothing.

Then one of her father's favorite remarks came to her.

JESS

"Eat the crusts, child. Eat the crusts and be thankful." In her childhood days Jess had liked the soft bread in the middle and had disdained the crusts. This hard condition was another crust. Better to eat it than have no bread at all.

Jess had never sent a telegram in her life. She walked down the street to the Maine Point House. Clarence Popham would be open until nine. It would be fun mystifying him. Like Mr. Struthers, Clarence thought of her as a child in braids.

He was in shirt sleeves, as always, and took the message which she had with some difficulty composed:

I agree with pleasure stop please send contract stop gratefully yours.

Jessie Randall

The little middle-aged man looked up at her sharply and chuckled. "You goin' into business, Jessie?"

"You have to keep messages secret, don't you, Clarence?"

"Sure . . . sure thing. Get fired if I peeped a word."

"That's good," Jess said and left. The look on Clarence's face was a caution. Suddenly Jess saw the whole affair in a new and blinding light. She would be the center of a mystery. She was already carrying it around. She could listen to what people said about her book. They would talk to her

RE-ENTER EDDIE

far more frankly than if they knew she'd written it. She'd find out the truth instead of polite lies. "Eat the crusts, child." She found herself *wanting* to keep the secret. Nobody should know, not even her family. Bill only. It was, somehow, more wonderful to have a secret with Bill than to see her name on signboards. Jess walked home elated, not on the pavement but up somewhere near the Great Dipper.

Jess had hardly got accustomed to living with her secret before the next excitement arrived. The last Friday in October she had come home from school to lunch and had not reached the kitchen before her mother called: "There's a message on the hall table. It's a telegram Clarence just phoned."

Jess's heart fluttered up into her throat. Perhaps the publishers had changed their minds. Then she forgot that as the words sank in:

Little bird says listen *Information, Please* tonight sure stop can't say more stop thousand congrats stop will be listening.
Bill.

"Mother! *Mother!*" Jess tore out into the kitchen. "They're going to ask my questions! *Information, Please* is! Tonight! Think of it! I'm going to hear Mr. Fadiman ask my questions!" Jess caught her mother and swung her around and around in an ecstasy of joy.

JESS

"Jessie, dear!" panted Mrs. Randall. "I'm . . . so glad . . . but don't . . . choke me!"

"Oh, isn't it wonderful? Let's have a party, a listening party. Do you think they'll guess them?"

Mr. Randall entered and looked at his breathless wife, his exuberant daughter, in wonder. "What's going on? Are you crazy?"

"Dad! Where'll we put them? The twenty-four volumes of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*?" gasped Jess teasingly.

Mrs. Randall pushed back her hair. "Jessie thinks her questions are going to be asked tonight, Elbert."

"Doesn't it mean that? Look, Dad," and Jess held the message for him to read. "Doesn't it?"

"As your loving father, I'd say yes. As your lawyer, perhaps."

"Oh, that law! That old kill-joy. That's one thing I'm never going to have anything to do with, Dad, your old law. Of course it means that, though I don't know how Bill knew."

"Little birds are sometimes very inquisitive and knowing creatures," Mr. Randall said. "Do we live on joy, or do we have dinner?"

All afternoon, after Jess had told everybody in school, and most of the town, it seemed, she lived in the New York

RE-ENTER EDDIE

studio. She could hear Mr. Fadiman's very intonations as he put her questions. She wondered who the guest of the evening would be. She heard, in her head, Mr. Kieran say he gave up. Even having her book accepted had given her no such acute pleasure as this.

Mrs. Randall had readily agreed to have a few friends in. Jess hurried home to help her to make the sandwiches. As she leaped up the porch steps, Eddie Briggs came out of the house. "I was looking for you, Jess. Mom's sick, and there's eight hunters come in, and Mom wants to know . . ."

"Oh, Eddie!" Jess cried out. "Don't ask me! I can't! I'm having a party. A coming-out-on-the-air party. *Information, Please!* Those questions I told you about."

"Oh, gee! That's swell. But Mom's counting on you terrible. She can't lift her head, she says, and you're the only one knows everything."

"I'll talk to her, Eddie," Jess said.

"She can't even come to the phone," Eddie said. "She's awful sick."

Mrs. Randall had come to the door. She was troubled, for she knew what a blow this was to Jess, and also how indebted Jess was to Mrs. Briggs. Eddie was nearly crying.

"Can't the hunters go to the hotel, Eddie?" she asked.

"No'm. They have to get up and leave at four tomorrow morning and the hotel won't give 'em any breakfast. Mom

JESS

may have to go to the hospital, Doc Ewart says." Eddie began to snifle.

"I'll go, Jessie," Mrs. Randall said. "I'm not going to have you miss your questions. It isn't right."

Jess shook her head. "No, Mother. It's too hard work for you, if there are that many."

"Well, I'll phone Sadie Andrews. She's used to cooking for guides."

"Sadie's in Portland. I thought of her. And Mrs. Weeson's sick, and Mrs. Briggs won't have Nora Tramley in the house."

"You comin'?" Eddie asked.

"Wait a moment, let me think," Mrs. Randall said.

"No use, Mother," Jess said miserably. "I've thought of everybody we could ask. Mrs. Briggs depends on me, and she's been a big help to me. I can't go back on her now with that houseful and those children. After all it's just *questions*. You can tell me what they say."

"I'm not going to have you do it," Mrs. Randall said. "I can make out. I'm not infirm, I guess, and you've been counting on this all summer."

Eddie looked up slyly. "We got a radio," he said.

"That settles it, Mother," Jess said. She knew that listening in the Briggs's home would be very different from what

RE-ENTER EDDIE

she had counted on, but maybe she'd be through cooking in time, though hunters had their own ideas about time. "Wait a minute, Eddie, and I'll be with you."

"Yip, yip," Eddie said, instantly brighter.

Jess walked rapidly across the fields, making Eddie run every few steps to keep up. She wanted to cry, and she was ashamed of herself for putting her own wish to hear her name over against the suffering and worry Mrs. Briggs was going through. "Eat the crusts, child. Eat the crusts." She could hear her father saying it. And she *was* going to hear even if not as she desired. She thought of Bill. He'd feel sorry for her. Somehow that helped.

The moment she'd entered the farmhouse she was glad she'd come. Things were at sixes and sevens and thirteens, Jess added mentally. Mrs. Briggs's relief was touching. "You're good to come," she said weakly. "I guess I'd just've about give up, without you, and I expect you had something you wanted to do, too."

"No, nothing that mattered," Jess said, bravely.

"She was going to be on the radio, Mom," Eddie said.

"You don't say!" Mrs. Briggs exclaimed faintly. "Like my Eddie was?"

"No, Mrs. Briggs. *Information, Please* is going to ask some questions I sent in. That's all." She tried to sound

JESS

as if it was quite unimportant. "Perhaps I can hear part of the program on your radio. It doesn't come till eight thirty."

"Now, ain't that a pity!" Mrs. Briggs said. "Our radio's busted. The kids busted it and I never got around to having it fixed up."

Jess looked at Eddie. He turned his face away. She remembered the sly look in his eyes when he had said, "We got a radio." He'd known it was broken.

For an instant anger swept over Jess at this deception like a sheet of flame. Then she realized that he had done it to get her to help his mother at any cost, and she kept her anger unspoken. After all, she thought, what would it matter a year from now? What, indeed? "Now, I'll start getting the kitchen to rights, Mrs. Briggs," she said. "Just you lie still and don't worry about a thing. After everything's washed up, I'll run home for a few minutes, but I'll come back and get the men's breakfast. So don't have a thing on your mind."

It was almost ten o'clock when she reached home to be greeted by a dozen eager, congratulatory people.

"You sure stumped 'em, Jess."

"What're you going to do with all those books, Jessie?"

"You cert'nly put Maine Point on the map, tonight, Jess."

RE-ENTER EDDIE

"Wasn't you tickled, Jessie, to hear your very words?"

Jess swallowed. "I didn't hear them, Miss Struthers. The radio was broken."

A moment of silence greeted this news and then a chorus of: "I do declare . . ." "Now don't that beat all!" "That's terrible, Jess, and you countin' on it so much!" "You should've come right back."

"You can tell me about it," Jess said. "Who answered which?"

"Mr. Fadiman was grand," Miss Malvinia spoke up. "He said, 'Gentlemen, here are three questions from Miss Jessie Randall, of Maine Point, in that rock-ribbed state of Republicanism and Holy Writ. These questions pertain to the Bible, and you must know all three, for ignorance of the Bible, gentlemen, is inexcusable.'"

"Oh, did he really?" Jess blessed Miss Malvinia's precise memory. "Who . . . I mean what was the first question?"

"That one about the woman with the most imagination," Miss Malvinia went on. "Mr. Morley answered it. Mr. Christopher Morley. He was the guest. And he got it first crack. He said it had to be Eve for who else could imagine living with Adam?"

"The traitor!" Mr. Randall muttered with a smile.

"That had them laughing," Miss Malvinia continued.

JESS

"Then Mr. Fadiman asked who was the woman who had risked her life to save her cousin, and Mr. Kieran said Esther, right off, and Mr. Fadiman asked who was the cousin, and Mr. Kieran said Mordecai, and Mr. Fadiman said, 'How did Mordecai happen to be Queen Esther's cousin?' and Mr. Kieran knew that, too. He said Esther was Mordecai's uncle's daughter. Everybody clapped, and they had a right to, and Mr. Fadiman asked Mr. Kieran if he could recite all the other genealogies in the Bible. And Mr. Kieran said he didn't know. Nobody'd asked him to. 'Well,' Mr. Fadiman said, 'time presses, so we won't go into that at the moment.' And everybody laughed again."

"We didn't, though," Mr. Randall broke in. "We were getting mighty nervous, Jess. I began to hanker for that *Britannica* for the long winter evenings."

"Then," Miss Malvinia said, "Mr. Fadiman asked what woman in the Old Testament was so important to a young man that history would have been totally different without her. That had them thinking. Mr. Levant said it was probably the seamstress who sewed up Joseph's coat of many colors. Mr. Fadiman said he would give them one tip: it was a very, very young man indeed. But that didn't help at all. So out he came with it, Pharaoh's daughter who rescued Moses from the bulrushes, and never got a vote of thanks from anybody, so far as it is recorded. Then he rang up the

RE-ENTER EDDIE

money on the cash register, and said the *Encyclopædia Britannica* would be sent, and everyone clapped. And we were so proud of you that we didn't hear the rest of the program, Jessie."

All in the room clapped when Miss Malvinia stopped, but she hadn't quite finished. "But we don't have to tell you why we are proudest, Jessie. For going over to Mrs. Briggs's and for *staying* to do your duty when it was so hard. Some of us here may forget those questions, but we shall never forget that, not as long as we live."

"That's correct," Miss Tottem nodded emphatically.

"Nor will we," came from others in the room.

Jess felt suddenly close to tears again. She was warmed through and through by the sincerity and affection of these neighbors who had seemed such everyday people to her. This was no brief moment of personal excitement, such as she had been looking forward to. This was the real, rewarding thing. She was very glad that her mother chose that moment to ask her to pass the cake.

11



JESS stayed at the Briggs farm until Mrs. Briggs had recovered sufficiently to take over. She had never worked so hard at such a variety of things before. She had never been happier.

The appreciation and affection shown by her neighbors on the evening of her *Information, Please* triumph gave her a constant inner glow of satisfaction, a peace, as if a long conflict had been ended. But there were more immediate reasons for her happiness. She had received telegrams from Bill and Harriet the day after, and also a mysterious message, purporting to come from the other world, but which sounded like Bill. It said:

Am grateful for last night's expression of appreciation stop the first tribute received from your small planet in three thousand four hundred and eighty-seven years.

Shade of Pharaoh's daughter.



HARVEST

Harriet's wire went:

Congratulations on stumping Mr. Kieran and Co. stop mother put off going to a party in order to listen stop we were all thrilled to pieces.

Harriet.

But it was Bill's message that stepped up Jess's heartbeat. It said:

Information please stop what girl not mentioned in the Old Testament is the swellest pal a fellow could want question mark exclamation point stop congrats two exclamation points stop Harriet lost five pounds during the excitement stop congrats again.

Bill.

"He's crazy and I love him," Jess thought. Life had got exciting and wonderful.

And then, on the first day she was home to stay, the expressman stopped at the house just as they were sitting down to the midday meal. It was the *Encyclopædia Britannica* arriving.

"Mercy, dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Randall as Jess unpacked the handsome volumes. "Where do you plan to put them?"

"In the living room, Mother. They'll go on the bottom shelf of the bookcase."

"If this keeps on, I see where I'll have to build a new

JESS

house," Mr. Randall said. "We'll have a trophy room about ninety feet long for Jess's winnings . . . Now what?"

Clarence Popham was knocking at the screen door. Jess went and he said: "Seein' as I was just goin' home for dinner, I brought this, Jessie. You're getting a sight of telegrams these days."

"Another telegram?" Mr. Randall exclaimed. "Who thinks you're smart now, Jess?"

Jess had to make a decision. The wire was from Cromwell, Adamson & Co. asking her to rush substitute names for her villagers, give her nom de plume, and submit a title for her book. She had kept the entire matter a secret from her family. But now she needed help. A title! She glanced up from the paper and said to her father, as casually as possible, "This one's from my publisher, Dad."

"Your publisher, did you say?" Mr. Randall asked. "My hearing isn't so good since we got the radio."

"You heard right this time," Jess laughed with happiness.

"Jessie, whatever are you talking about?" Mrs. Randall demanded. "I think this excitement is going to your head."

"Just where it should go, Mother," Mr. Randall observed. "Just how did you acquire a publisher, daughter? And when? And what on earth has he got to publish?"

"Dad, do you remember that night last May when you had an argument with Mother about Eve?"

HARVEST

"Nonsense, you know I never argue with your mother." Mr. Randall said, but Jess caught his half wink.

"You never stop arguing, Elbert, and you know it. Jessie, what do your father's arguments have to do with a publisher?"

"Father said that no woman could keep a diary, Mother. Do you remember now?" Jess was smiling at the surprise to come.

"If I said that I've got to stick to it I suppose," Mr. Randall observed. "I'm never wrong, you know."

"Please, dear!" Mrs. Randall exclaimed to her husband. "Let Jessie explain. Did some publisher find a woman's diary?"

"Yes. Mine!" Jess said triumphantly. "I went upstairs that evening and started one, and I wrote in it every single day, and now Cromwell, Adamson & Co. are going to publish it!"

"Jessie!" Mrs. Randall was startled. "What *do* you mean?"

"Cromwell, Adamson & Co.?" Mr. Randall exclaimed. "Why, bless me, they're the best house in New York. Are you in earnest, Jess?"

"Cross my heart, Dad. There's the telegram." She passed it over to her father. If Jess had just proved she had written the whole *Encyclopædia Britannica*, her parents could

JESS

not have been more surprised and impressed. Jess tingled with delight, gratification, and shivery anticipations of more excitement to come. She was glad now the secret was out, for it was so much more fun sharing her new interests with the people she loved.

"And now, you two," she said to her parents. "I need your help with the title."

"That's easy," Mr. Randall said, "*A Woman's Diary*, or *One on Papa*."

"Now, Elbert, be serious, if you can," Mrs. Randall begged. "Jessie needs our help."

"After she's got this far?" Mr. Randall exclaimed.

"Why not call it simply *My Diary*, Jessie?" Mrs. Randall asked.

"It isn't to come out over my own name, Mother," Jess said. "It's too personal. There's a lot about you both in it, too."

"How dreadful!" Mr. Randall cried in mock terror.

"He doesn't mean that at all, Jessie," Mrs. Randall said.

"I'm delighted to be in it, and so is your father, too."

"If I weren't in it I'd sue you for libel," Mr. Randall said.

"I'll sue you anyway, if I haven't been quoted correctly."

Jess laughed. Prickles of delight twinkled over her. Her father always lived up to her best moments and made them better with his teasing and affection. "Don't worry," she

HARVEST

said. "You're quoted correctly, but not *too* correctly. Besides, the whole point of changing names is so that you can't sue me, Dad, and remember, *please*, both of you, this is a secret. You mustn't breathe a word of it to a soul, not one word!"

"Do you want to kill your mother?" Mr. Randall asked. "Can you picture her seeing your book in somebody's hands and not saying, 'My daughter wrote that'?"

"Elbert, I do wish you wouldn't exaggerate so," Mrs. Randall objected. "If Jessie says that it has to be a secret I shan't be the first to mention it, you can rely on that."

"Well, there won't be any book if we can't get a title," Jess said.

"I suggest *Diary of a Diabolical Daughter*," Mr. Randall said. "Imagine snooping around the house, Mother, until she hears us say something scandalous and then rushing to a publisher with it! How do you like that?" He looked at Jess.

"Leave out the 'diabolical' and it would sound very well," Mrs. Randall remarked.

"*Diary of a Daughter . . . Diary of a Daughter*," Jess repeated. "I like that."

"And as there must be twenty or thirty million daughters in the country who might be intrigued into buying the book I'd say my suggestion was *very* good." Mr. Randall put his

JESS

thumbs in his vest and looked pleased. "Is there anything else you need assistance with, Jess?"

"Yes, I need names for everybody . . . Miss Tottem, Miss Malvinia, Eddie, Mr. Struthers, Bill, Harriet, you . . . loads of people!"

"I can see that this is going to be fun," Mr. Randall said.

There was more of what Mr. Randall called fun when the contract came. Jess was glad that she had a legal-minded parent to go over it with. The book was to bring her in 10 per cent of its list price of \$2 for the first 5,000 copies, and 15 per cent after that. Then there were exciting paragraphs which secured to her radio and movie rights and it mentioned translation into foreign languages and other matters which suddenly transformed the business of being an author into a world-wide affair and made Jess half dizzy with anticipation.

The arrival of the proof was another surprise. The narrow galleys, nearly a yard long, with directions for making changes in the text and correcting printer's errors, looked tremendously convincing. She was practically an author. The company wrote that they had fixed the date of publication for December 1 and urged promptness. Jess and her father sat up most of one night to scrutinize each phrase, each item of punctuation.

Mr. Randall said things to Jess during that midnight vigil

HARVEST

which knit them in a tighter bond than ever before. He had been immensely moved by the revelation of his daughter's inner feeling and her spiritual growth through her ordeals. He was not a man to gush or wear his affection outwardly. But Jess knew, as he read over passage after passage, that he was as thrilled as herself. When they had corrected the final galley, he said: "Jess, I don't wonder that the best publishing house in the country grabbed that manuscript up. You've done something. You've shown one human being as she is, without glossing over her faults or foolishly concealing her virtues. I'm deeply proud of you, Jess, deeply."

"Daddy, what I am is all due to you and Mother."

"You were never more wrong. These pages show it. They touch me because I see how much you've suffered alone, and how much you've come through, thanks to a help we could not give you. We've tried, Jess, to give you a good home, to show you what honesty is, and decency, and the fundamentals of good living. But you've changed our advice into action, and you've made the crucial decisions. There was one entry I value most of all," and he began to shuffle back through the proofs. "Here it is. That Sunday when Mr. Meekom preached on 'The kingdom of God is within you.' And you realized that that was true."

"But, Dad, that was thanks to Mr. Meekom," Jess murmured.

JESS

"Which matters most, Jess, the signboard on the road or the person who trudges along as the signboard directs? "

"They both matter, Dad. If it weren't for the signboard, the person wouldn't know where to go."

"All right, I grant you that much. But in our daily life here there are lots of signboards, but how many follow them? There isn't a soul in this village who doesn't know what's right and if he hasn't heard it a hundred times from his parents or from Mr. Meekom, he has from his conscience, just as you heard it that morning on Nameless Pond. But I'm asking you *how many obey?* "

"You never know, Dad. Maybe more than you think."

"Perhaps. But what I'm getting at, Jess, is this. Let me put it this way: Everybody in Christendom has heard the advice, 'Be good and you'll be happy.' Well, everybody believes it. Everybody. So you'd think everybody would be happy, instead of desperately unhappy. Why are they unhappy — since that statement *is* true, divinely true? They're unhappy because, while they believe the statement, they haven't enough faith in it to try it, to rely on it. They don't *know* it, as you know that two times two is four, absolutely, and for every occasion. So they don't try it. You *do* try it. In this diary you made the big choice a dozen times. You did the right thing when it was hard, and look what's come of it. Happiness. Accomplishment. Helpfulness. The pub-

HARVEST

lication of this diary will help hundreds of people, thousands maybe. You're grown-up, and I didn't know it."

Jess was moved, for her father had never talked to her quite like this.

"Just the same," and Mr. Randall was back in his usual mood again, "you're not so grown-up that I don't have to tell you to go to bed. It's shockingly late. And this has been the biggest evening of my life."

Jess saw that joy was a richer, wider province than she had ever dreamed. She kissed her father good night knowing that she had something she could never lose. It had been for her the biggest evening, too.

November was on its last legs when the thunderbolt came. It came via the United States Mail which transmits carloads of thunderbolts daily. Jess was stunned but not incapacitated for walking or running. She still had breath, when she reached the kitchen, to shriek: "Mother, listen to this! The most absolutely excitingly gorgeous thing has happened. Guess! "

"I'm too busy, child . . ."

"Oh, Mother, let the cake burn! Guess once, please."

The urgency of Jess's voice had reached Mrs. Randall. "What is it, Jessie? I can't guess. You won the history prize."

JESS

"Oh, fiddle, a history prize! Listen . . . It's a letter . . . 'Dear Miss Randall . . . By coincidence we were lunching with Mr. Cromwell, the publisher, yesterday, and he happened to mention his interest in *Diary of a Daughter*. A few questions convinced us that the people of our country would like very much to meet so young and charming an author. We have a place for you on the program of *We, the People*, for Tuesday, December 9, and of course are glad to pay your expenses to and from this city and during your stay. If you will kindly let us know whether or not you can find it convenient to accept our invitation, we will at once send you further particulars. Trusting that we may have the pleasure, we remain . . . ' Mother, did you ever hear of anything so *completely* glorious? "

Mrs. Randall had been more shocked by the thunderbolt than Jess. She saw in a flash that her daughter was grown-up, was acceptable to the great world, was ready to fly the nest. The sharpness of this revelation almost overbalanced her natural pleasure in Jess's happiness. "I think it is most remarkable, Jessie," she said.

Jess threw her arms about her mother. "Don't look like a person going to a funeral, Mother."

"But you'll have to go to New York."

"Of course I will." Jess laughed. "But you can check up on me. All you have to do is sit by the radio, 9 o'clock,

HARVEST

Tuesday week, and listen to me. Imagine, Mother, the whole country will be listening, too. San Francisco and Denver and New Orleans and a million places. And everybody here, including Miss Simpson. Won't it *kill* her?" Jess paused for a gulp of air. "I wonder if *I'll* die out there in front of all those people. I never thought of that."

The buoyancy faded from Jess's mood like the light from a match just blown out. For the first time she was confronted with the serious side of being a public character.

Mrs. Randall's Maine backbone rallied to Jess. "Nonsense, Jessie. You won't die and don't think you're going to. But it's a big thing to have sprung on you all at once. You'll have to talk it over with your father, dear."

"Oh, he'll agree. He'll say it's just right. It'd help the sale of my book, Mother, too. Think of that."

"There are a great many things to think about, Jessie."

There were, and parties interested will have to consult Jess's diary for the onrush of events that followed. Jess telegraphed her good news to Bill, since glory should have wings, and he wired back:

Now you done it stop no don't stop letter of detailed congratulations follows.

Bill.

JESS

With Bill's letter, which was funny and dear and appreciative, came two others. The one on violet-tinted paper in the big hand so hard to decipher said:

My dear Miss Randall,

Let me add my congratulations to those of the Wolverton family on your splendid achievements. All of us are looking forward to your broadcast and we hope that you will be our guest from Saturday, December 6, until Wednesday. Bill and Harriet will be at home and it will delight them to show you a little of New York. Mr. Wolverton joins me in regards to your family. They must feel very proud of you.

Cordially yours,

Alice Massey Wolverton

The other was from Harriet:

Dearest Jess,

I can't *say* how excited I am about your coming to New York and your appearance on the air! And we're going to have such fun on our reunion! Make a list of everything you want to see and do.

Do you remember the day I suggested we drive over to the country club and you said you had only frog-catching clothes? It almost nearly made me very, very sore, for you have lovely clothes. They're just right for your color and nice *slim* figure — which Bill never gets tired of recommending to me. So

HARVEST

don't worry about Park Avenue. I know some very nice reasonable places to shop, too, if you have to get anything.

I'm enclosing a timetable and Bill and I will meet the train I've marked, unless you wire differently. I can't wait to show you *my* book. It will never be published like yours, but it's a success already — it's those Maine recipes, which I've tried and tested on my captive friends. "Down with the scales!" says Bill. And so do I, but with the opposite meaning.

Yours till Miss Simpson sees a joke,
that is, forever,
Harriet.

The diary gives a hint of the preparations for the great adventure and some of the collateral fun: the farewell party tendered Jess by her classmates at school at which she was presented with a handsome suitcase which Miss Malvinia took a special trip to Portland to select; the last night at home when Mr. Randall warned Jess of the risky things which a girl traveling alone must look out for; the good-bys; the novelty of a first night in a sleeper; the new loneliness as the train pulled into overwhelming New York; and the sharp rebound to joy when Jess saw Bill's face, friendly and grinning, with Harriet, so comfortable and composed and "lean-on-able" (as Jess wrote home) beside him.

See the diary, too, for her first impressions of the Grand Central Terminal, the never-ending flow of human beings, the

JESS

cab jams in the streets, the uniformed attendant at the canopied entrance to the Park Avenue apartment house, the huge luxurious elevator (Jess's first!), and Bill's remark as he threw open the apartment door, "Enter the Wolverton dump."

The "dump," Jess thought, was something beyond the imagination of princesses. It was so beautiful and so much like a home as well, even if it hung between heaven and earth on the eighteenth floor. There was even a log fire burning cheerfully, and Mrs. Wolverton coming forward to greet Jess as if she had always been a member of the family.

"Harriet will show you to your mousetrap," Bill said a little later, "but if you stay in there to talk more than ninety seconds, I'm going to crash it. I don't know many celebrities, see?"

"It's not quite a mousetrap," Harriet said. The room was really about three times as big as Jess's at home. "But Bill is down on apartments. And he's right. Now let's talk first about what *you* want to do most, Jess, before Bill mounts his high horse."

But it was not all luxury and sight-seeing and wild efforts to get from one excitement to the next for Jess. It was not all marvelous food and miracles of lighting and endless laughter. The hour of Jess's going before the microphone was getting

HARVEST

nearer and nearer. At first she felt only a slight momentary weakness when she thought of it, due to all the novelty and fun. But during the service on Sunday — they had taken her to one of the famous churches — a tightening somewhere between her heart and her breathing gave her a faintly sickening sensation. She had had to speak only once or twice in her life, and then before little gatherings of people she knew. Now it was to be before the whole United States and Canada with lots of her friends listening. Quickly she forced her attention back to the service.

By Monday the tightenings came oftener and they began to affect her appetite. Bill noticed and said, "Not nervous, are you, Jess?"

"Oh, no, Bill. I'd give a million dollars to be back in Maine Point under the bed, that's all."

"Of course Jess is nervous," Harriet said, "and I don't see why you have to mention it. I'd fly apart with nervousness if I had to do what she does."

"You?" and Bill haw-hawed. "A jellified coagulated mass like you fly apart? A hundred and forty pounds of butter explode in dust, I suppose? That'd be something new for science. Nitro-gelatinel"

"Don't mind him, Harriet," Jess said and she was interested to see that Harriet was impervious to her brother's gibes. There was a difference in them. Bill had no desire to hurt or

JESS

even change Harriet, as he had six months before, and Harriet knew this and was willing to contribute to the gaiety. Jess was grateful to them for trying to divert her attention, but the hour which she had wanted more than anything, and which she now would give anything to have over, marched toward her with crushing inevitability.

Bill obtained permission to attend the rehearsal with Jess. This affair was so new to both of them, so well-run, that Jess was taken out of herself. "Why, they're just people like myself!" she thought. She was to follow a man who had been struck by lightning seven times.

"Pity Ben Franklin didn't know him," Bill whispered to her. "He needn't've bothered making that kite."

This remark amused Jess so that she forgot to be nervous when she was called on. When she read her script to the mike, she was complimented on her voice. Afterward she could listen with greater attention to the others. She was impressed by a German without a country who had taken to the sea to find peace. He said: "If I have learned anything, it is that one doesn't sail with the wind of tomorrow, or the wind of yesterday. Folks, find your happiness today."

After the rehearsal, Jess was greeted by several of the gathering as a celebrity in her own right. This was so novel and refreshing that her self-consciousness vanished. She forgot herself completely in asking these others, whom Sanka

HARVEST

Coffee had assembled from the four corners of the country, about themselves and their way of living.

"Yes," Bill said slowly, when they left, "There must be a Sanka Claus after all."

Jess, all her tension evaporated, burst into laughter. "Bill, do you want to kill me before the broadcast?"

"Not at all. Do you wish to be killed? By the way, Jess, I have a message for you which I was told to deliver after the rehearsal. Mr. Cromwell wants Harriet and me to bring you to his office at noon tomorrow. He said that he was sorry the book's publication had been delayed a week, but it will definitely go on sale tomorrow and the publicity build-up wants you for new photographs. Then Mr. Cromwell is taking us to lunch somewhere."

"One excitement follows another," Jess said. "I don't see how I can stand much more."

"It seems to agree with you," Bill said. "It has a pleasant effect on me, too," and Bill grinned. "On all of us, for that matter. Mother's enjoyed having you down, Jess, more than anything in years. She told me so last night."

"That's because she's been such an angel to me," Jess said. "When you give happiness, it always seems to come back to you increased. And she's been so good to me, Bill! That dress she gave me for tonight is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen."

JESS

"It had to be to match the wearer," Bill said quietly.

"Thanks, Bill . . . I wish somebody had told me how to handle compliments." Jess smiled.

"That wasn't a compliment. That was an observation. A statistic. But you do very well handling compliments," Bill went on. "A person who says something nice doesn't want it brushed aside too hastily, Jess. You know how to take a compliment, like a gift, look at it, appreciate it, and then gently set it down where it won't get hurt and still won't get in your way. That's the whole art of compliment handling."

"I don't wonder you can cut your college courses whole days at a time," Jess laughed. "You don't *need* to know any more."

"I wish you'd say that in front of Father," Bill laughed.

Yet, in spite of everyone's kindness, the tension came again to Jess that evening at dinner. It lay in the pit of her stomach. It lurked in the back of her head. The evening dress which Mrs. Wolverton had given her should have driven everything else away. Mr. Wolverton called her a vision. Bill asked how anybody could put a vision on the radio until television was developed. Harriet objected, too, because she said that visions vanished and she didn't want Jess to vanish. With jokes and teasing and no reference to the big moment

HARVEST

coming, they all did their best to make Jess's hour easier. But when Bill announced it was time to start for the studio, Jess felt that her knees were turning to water.

Before they got out of the car, Mrs. Wolverton took Jess's hand in the limousine's darkness, and said: "You will be talking to your father and mother in a few minutes, Jessie. Think just of them. Harriet told me of the evening you helped Mrs. Briggs instead of listening to *Information, Please*. I think that's the most unselfish thing I ever heard of. Anyone who is that unselfish has nothing to fear."

"It's wonderful to be surrounded by friends," Jess said quietly. "Thank you."

The minutes had now caught her like a tide. Bill escorted Jess around to the studio door. "Wait here, afterward, Jess. I'll come for you." His voice was all deep friendliness now. "I think you're the most wonderful girl I've ever known."

That somehow did the trick. Jess got hold of herself. Whatever happened, she could not let Bill down. And she had no reason to fear. With Bill near her in spirit, pulling for her, what else mattered? How had she deserved such joy?

Mr. Gabriel Heatter gave the company final instructions. The announcer stepped to the microphone. The red second hand on the big clock scooted around the dial once more and

JESS

it was nine o'clock. Jess pictured her father and mother sitting in that familiar room, hearing their clock strike nine, growing tense. . . . Then she was brought back by Mr. Heatter introducing the first guest.

Jess came third. For some reason a picture of Nameless Pond flashed into her mind as she stepped up beside the mike and waited. The audience was only a blur of faces, like a low surf that made no sound. She wondered where the Wolvertons were sitting.

Mr. Heatter smiled at her and said into the mike, "A few days ago I read an advance copy of a book entitled *Diary of a Daughter*, by Patricia. That's all, just Patricia, because, like kings and queens and princesses, she doesn't need a last name. I predict that in a very short time this book will be read all over this country as far as my voice is reaching now. For it is real. There is nothing in it made up to please people. I could not lay it down, as I usually lay books down late at night. And when I had reached the last page of this fascinating, homely chronicle of a young girl's life and dreams and trials and disappointments and affection and ambitions, I said to myself, 'I'd like to know that girl.' And I feel sure that that is what the men and women and boys and girls from Maine to California will be saying in a few weeks. So *We, the People* has asked Patricia to come here so that you

HARVEST

may meet her. Patricia, I'm sure that one of the things everybody will ask you is: 'How did you happen to write a book at sixteen? Most girls can hardly bother to write a letter at sixteen. How did you?' "

"It was all due to Adam and Eve — and Father, Mr. Heatter," Jess said. She heard a few laughs rise from the audience. "Father and Mother take sides, when it comes to talking about Adam and Eve. And one night last May, Father said that Eve didn't have it in her to write a diary."

"He was joking, I hope," Mr. Heatter said.

"Well, I'm not so sure," Jess said, and as the laughs increased she felt suddenly at ease. "It is very hard to tell when a lawyer is joking. Anyway, Mr. Heatter, I determined to start a diary, and to keep on with it without missing a day until I'd showed Father that a woman *had* it in her."

"Does he admit he's licked?" Mr. Heatter asked. "The copy sent me had 235 pages."

"Father is a lawyer," Jess said.

"How did you find so much to write?"

"That's like asking how the sun finds so many things to make grow, Mr. Heatter. As spring comes, the sun takes a nearer look at the soil, and there the things are. The minute I looked inside me, I found I was alive with things I wanted to say. I found, too, that my neighbors had come alive. The



JESS

things in me were just the feelings and wishes that a girl my age has. And the people in my village were the same as they always had been. It was the closer look that did it. I wasn't thinking of writing a book, you know. I was trying to put down sincerely and truthfully what I was doing, thinking, feeling, and hoping, and when other people came in, I put them down sincerely, too. The most fun there is is telling the truth. And it's the most exciting thing there is, too. Of course what started it was a burst of vanity, I guess you'd call it. Egotism. The silly desire to shine. Why, do you know — you do know now — my dearest desire was to be on this very program, to be called to *We, the People*. I thought it would be the most marvelous sensation in the world to have you speak my name to the world. I was very, very young eight months ago, I guess."

There were kindly laughs from all over the audience at this and Mr. Heatter said, "Are you telling me that you've outgrown us now, Patricia?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Heatter! This is a terribly proud moment for me, and I'm grateful to *We, the People* for even thinking of me. But what I mean to say is what a wonderful friend of mine once said to me while we were talking beside the most beautiful little pond in the world. He said, 'The trouble with you is that you want to be a blooming rose before you have a stem to stand on, or any roots.' Those weren't

HARVEST

his exact words, but that's what he meant, and it was horribly true. I wanted to be famous before I'd done one single thing even to be mentioned for in my own home or my own village. That's one thing that I've found out, anyway. What does a lot of hullabaloo about you matter, if you aren't a real somebody first? "

"I congratulate you, Patricia," Mr. Heatter said. "Let me assure you that anyone who has discovered that important truth for herself is already a somebody."

Applause, long and loud this time, came from the audience.

"You have mentioned the most beautiful little pond in the world," Mr. Heatter continued. "I think you have gone far in proving that big assertion by your description of Nameless Pond on page 112 of *Diary of a Daughter*. I wish you could read that page to our friends. Then I think they would begin to see why *Diary of a Daughter* has had an advance sale of over 15,000 copies."

"Oh, has it?" Jess exclaimed, involuntarily leaving her script.

Mr. Heatter smiled. "Yes, I ascertained that from your publisher an hour ago. I also ascertained that your advance copies had gone to your home and that you had not seen your book yet. So I sought for myself the privilege of sharing the greatest moment that comes to any author, the moment when he or she holds the first copy of the first book in his



JESS

or her hands. Patricia, it is with profound pleasure that I present you with this beautifully made copy of *Diary of a Daughter*."

Jess was startled, for none of this had been in the rehearsal. She took the book from Mr. Heatter's hands, loved the green jacket with the pine in darker green, thought of her father and mother, back there in Maine Point, and was recalled by the wave on wave of applause.

Mr. Heatter went on, "Now, for page 112, if you will."

So Jess read and, losing herself in that other day, took her listeners to the green stillness and the expectant beauty of the place where first she had got to see the real Bill. When she ended there was more genuinely meant applause. Mr. Heatter thanked her. And it was over.

During the rest of the half hour Jess sat on a rosy cloud, her head in another. A thousand thoughts and emotions whirled within her. Once she came down to earth to do a little arithmetic. Her royalty, as the contract stated, was 10 per cent of the book's price, for the first 5,000 copies, and 15 per cent after that. Ten per cent of \$2 was 20 cents a copy. On 5,000 copies that meant \$1,000. Fifteen per cent of \$2 was 30 cents a copy. On 10,000 copies that meant \$3,000. Four thousand dollars altogether! She could hardly believe it. Four thousand dollars was a fortune. She could have things, do things, give things . . . And what if the book went on

HARVEST

selling? She might be really rich, might . . . biff! Jess was up on her cloud again.

Then, before she knew it, the program was over. She was shaking hands with people, saying things to them, and hearing, indistinctly, the nice things they were saying to her. But it was all like a dream. Her real thoughts were in Maine Point. She wanted to hug her family. Fame, wealth, fun, affection, love, the beauty of sea and forest, fishing, Eddie Briggs, the astonishment on Miss Malvinia's face, and Miss Tottem's . . . these pictures and feelings ran over her like a spring tide dashing in through the Narrows.

And then she was standing, still, expectant, outside the studio door where Bill had promised to meet her. And suddenly she knew this excitement of fame and publicity and people's talking for what it was. It was like a beautiful fire on the hearth in the living room. It warmed you and fascinated you with its play of flames. But, enjoyable as it was, you knew you were waiting. For someone. That was the real thing, to be waiting for someone you couldn't live without. What was the grandest hearth in the world without . . .

"Musing on your greatness?" Bill had come, unobserved, from the other direction, and on his face spread his honest grin.

"I was waiting . . . as you told me."

JESS

"Fine, you're learning." Bill smiled. "How'd you like to come up to the Rainbow Room, Patricia, and watch Harriet eat?"

"I'd love to, on one condition, Bill."

"What's that?"

"That you never call me Patricia again. I'm Jess."

"That suits me . . . perfectly," Bill said, quietly, the banter gone, and in its place the something she so loved to hear. "And now, Jess, as we walk, may I strew a few verbal flowers beneath your feet . . ."



Received from
READER'S SERVICE
Fresb. Board of Foreign Missions

24

J